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WOMEN'S HOCKEY

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Results to weather EVM storm today

EC rejects demand of 22 parties to check VVPAT slips before counting

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The counting of votes for the Lok Sabha polls would be held on Thursday in the shadow of a raging controversy over security of the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and charges that they were being rigged. The Election Commission has rejected the demand by 22 political parties that voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) slips be matched with EVM data before counting of votes.

The grueling and bitterly fought seven-phase polls that began on April 11 concluded on May 19. Barring Jammu & Kashmir and West Bengal, voting has been largely peaceful. Security has been tightened across all the polling stations in the country with the Home Ministry directing extra-security around sensitive constituencies.

Most of the exit polls have predicted that the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is on course to retain power for a second term, riding on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charisma like the way he did in 2014.

However, the Opposition parties have trashed results of the exit polls, claiming that the BJP will suffer severe drubbing due to rising unemployment, farm distress and slowdown in the economy.

Around 67 per cent of the nearly 90 crore voters exercised

2019 Elections Battleground LOK SABHA

their franchise to elect 542 members of the Lok Sabha from 8,049 contestants.

Election Commission officials said the counting of votes will begin at 8 am on Thursday and results are expected only by late evening.

For the first time in Lok Sabha polls, the EC will tally vote count on EVMs with voter verified paper audit trail slips in five polling stations in each Assembly segment of a parliamentary constituency.

It will effectively mean that out of nearly 10.3 lakh polling stations, the EVM-VVPAT matching will take place in 20,600 such stations. In case of a mismatch, the results based on paper slip count will be considered as final.

Meanwhile, a day after 22 Opposition parties claimed they don't trust EVMs and demanded VVPAT slips be matched with EVM data before counting, the three-member EC on Wednesday rejected their demands saying there will not be any change in counting procedures.

The EC had made it clear to the parties on Tuesday that the old protocol would continue. The top officials of EC also met on Wednesday and decided to continue with

counting the slips at the end. The poll body is also learnt to have decided to count postal ballots simultaneously with electronic voting machine count due to the "sheer size" of the ballots received this time from service voters. The counting will involve the matching of VVPAT slips in five polling booths picked at random for each Assembly segment at the end of counting. As per procedure, postal ballots so far were the first to be counted.

As per EC, the exercise of counting postal ballots manually will itself take a couple of hours at least as the number of service voters stands at 18 lakh and these include personnel of the armed forces, Central police force personnel and State police personnel who are posted outside their constituencies. Diplomats and support staff posted in Indian embassies abroad are also counted as service voters. Out of the 18 lakh registered voters, 16.49 lakh have sent their postal ballots to their respective returning officers as on May 17.

Earlier, the Supreme Court had rejected Opposition's demand for at least 50 per cent VVPAT verification saying it is "not inclined to interfere".

Continued on Page 7



Security personnel guard an EVM strongroom at Gole Market in New Delhi on Wednesday

Ranjani Dimri | Pioneer

Loser Opp raising EVM bogey: Shah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP president Amit Shah on Thursday accused the Opposition parties of "disrespecting" people's mandate by questioning the credibility of EVMs and "tarnishing" Indian democracy in the face of its "likely defeat" in the Lok Sabha elections.

Suspecting Opposition's motives in raising doubts about EVMs, Shah said they started protesting against EVMs only after the sixth phase of polling and intensified it after exit

polls, which have predicted a comfortable victory for the BJP-led NDA. "How can you question EVMs credibility on the basis of exit polls," he asked in his tweet.

He also termed as unconstitutional the demand of 22 Opposition parties that the Election Commission change its counting protocol and count VVPAT slips first, saying any decision in this regard is not possible without an all-party consensus.

Referring to the statements of some Opposition leaders like

Uppendra Kushwaha that people can take up arms and resort to violence, he said such comments have no place in democracy and questioned them for challenging democracy.

The Opposition in Bihar on Tuesday had alleged that attempts were being made to manipulate the Lok Sabha poll results in favour of the NDA, and warned that "blood may spill on the streets".

Opposition to EVMs amounts to disrespecting people's mandate, Shah said.

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Opp raps EC, calls EVMs 'Electronic Victory Machines'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Hours after the Election Commission (EC) on Wednesday rejected demand of 22 Opposition parties for VVPAT slips' check before the counting, the Opposition parties hit back saying the poll panel has lost its credibility and dubbed the electronic voting machines (EVMs) as "Election Victory Machines".

Congress spokesperson Abhishek Manu Singhvi said the EC has rejected their request to check the VVPAT slips, "which we came to know through the media" reports. "The interesting thing is we have not received any formal orders yet," he said, adding earlier the poll panel had declined 15-20 requests of the party without giving any reason. He said the EC means "Eradicated Credibility" and EVMs have become "Electronic Victory Machines" for BJP.

The Congress Rajya Sabha MP said the EC, for "confidence building", should have accepted the request of 22 Opposition parties that "represent 75 per cent of the population". "During our talks

with the EC, they cited rule 56(B). But the rule 56(D) says for mandatory sample check of the VVPAT slips. Rule 56(B) and 56(D) are complete different things," he said.

Reacting to the EC decision, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury tweeted, "This goes against the spirit of the Supreme Court Order on VVPATs delivered before polling began. If the process has been so long drawn for the sake of integrity of the electoral process, why is (the) EC not adhering to the basic principle of testing the sample first?"

TDP general secretary Nara Lokesh tweeted, "A genuine and fair demand for transparency is chucked out the window without a reason. A dark day for Indian democracy!... By ignoring the genuine demand of the majority of parties, the EC has shown once again whose side it wants to take."

AAP leader and Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia tweeted if all the arguments of EC were accepted in past also, then no reform in election process was needed.

Continued on Page 7

Break-in at IAF Rafale office in Paris fuels espionage fear

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The ₹59,000 crore Rafale fighter jets deal, which has been in the centre of a bitter political slugfest between the Congress and the NDA Government, is back in the news after some unidentified persons made an attempt to break into the Paris office of Indian Air Force (IAF) project management team supervising the Rafale project. Espionage angle is not ruled out.

The incident took place on Sunday last and reports indicated that no hard disk or any other sensitive documents were stolen. The local police registered a case and is investigating about the motive, sources said here on Wednesday. However, the IAF and the Defence Ministry here refused to comment on the issue.

The IAF project team is headed by a Group Captain, aided by three other officers. The office to oversee the Rafale jet manufacturing is located in Saint Cloud suburb of Paris.

According to reports, since the administrative office does



not keep money or valuables, it is possible that this could be a case of espionage to get hold of crucial data related to the Rafale deal. They also said the incident occurred on the Dassault Aviation premises.

Rafale is a nuclear capable aircraft and an attempt to get hold of technical specifications of the India-specific aircraft could seriously compromise its operations once the fleet of aircraft is inducted in the IAF, sources said. The Defence Ministry was briefed by the IAF about the incident, they added.

India and France had signed the Government to Government deal in September 2016 to buy 36 Rafale medium

multi-role combat aircraft in fly-away condition. Dassault is manufacturing the aircraft as per the Indian specifications. There are nearly 13 India specific enhancements and the project management team is stationed in Paris to ensure the implementation.

As per the contract, the delivery of the fighter jets will begin in 36 months from the date of inking the contract and the entire fleet will be inducted in 67 months. The first lot is expected to reach India later this year.

The IAF plans to base the Rafale at Ambala and Hasimara, and infrastructure is development for the jets is in full swing.

Opp ups Govt bid if NDA fails even by a whisker

Pawar contacts YSR Cong chief, KCR, Naveen

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Unfazed by the findings of the exit polls, the Opposition is continuing with its efforts to form a non-BJP front so as to form a Government in case the NDA falls short of the halfway mark even marginally.

While Congress chief Rahul Gandhi and party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi have asked party workers and its Lok Sabha candidates not to believe the "fake and manipulated" exit polls, NCP supremo Sharad Pawar has established contact with YSR Congress leader Jagan Mohan Reddy, TRS leader K Chandrababhan Rao and BJD chief Naveen Patnaik in the last 24 hours.

Sources said Pawar is believed to have convinced Jagan, KCR and Patnaik to join the Opposition rank to prevent Prime Minister Narendra Modi from staging a comeback.



Congress sources said Naveen Patnaik also received a call from Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath. Both Patnaik and Nath are Doon School pals. Patnaik so far has maintained equidistance from the NDA and Congress-led alliances, but recently he announced to support whoever "offers the best package" for Odisha.

Sources said Pawar's mission has been successful since all the three leaders are believed to have assured him of their

support by if the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) has the numbers to form a stable Government.

Pawar has already been in touch with TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Uttar Pradesh Mahatgathbandhan leaders Mayawati and Akhilesh Yadav, besides Congress leaders, including UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi.

While Pawar was tasked by Sonia to be the "catalyst"

between secular and non-BJP parties, Naidu has already held several rounds of meetings criss-crossing the country. On Tuesday late night, the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister called on his Karnataka counterpart, HD Kumaraswamy, and his father former PM HD Deve Gowda. Karnataka has a Congress-JD(S) alliance Government.

"Pawar's role will be crucial in bridging the possible differences between YSR and TDP or TRS. Jagan is also being pur-

sued by the BJP, which is trying to consolidate its numbers, just in case they require," said political sources.

A confident Rahul on his part urged party leaders to be "alert in the next 24 hours" and "be fearless as exit polls are fake". "The next 24 hours are important. Be alert and vigilant. Don't be afraid. You are fighting for the truth. Don't be disheartened by what the fake exit polls are propagating. Have faith in yourselves and the Congress. Your hard work will not go in vain, Jai Hindii," Rahul tweeted.

Priyanka too said in a message to party workers that they should not fall for "rumours" intended to make them drop their guard ahead of the counting of votes.

"My dear Congress workers, sisters and brothers... Don't let rumours and exit polls discourage you. This is being done just to break your determination. It is very important that you remain alert amid all this. Please continue to keep vigil outside strongrooms and counting centres. We are confident that our combined efforts will bear fruit," Priyanka said in the audio message.

IAF accomplishes BrahMos feat

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Air Force (IAF) on Wednesday successfully test-fired the aerial version of the supersonic BrahMos cruise missile from a Su-30 MKI fighter aircraft at the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, marking a major milestone to enhance its precision strike capability.

The 2.5 tonne air-to-surface missile has a range of around 300 km, and it will significantly enhance the IAF's combat capability, military officials said.

The BrahMos cruise missile travels at a speed of Mach 2.8, nearly three times that of sound. "The launch from the aircraft was smooth and the missile followed the desired trajectory before directly hitting the land target," IAF spokesperson Group Capt Anupam Banerjee said.

The IAF became the first air force in the world to have successfully fired an air-



IAF successfully test-fires air version of BrahMos missile from its frontline fighter aircraft Su-30 MKI on Wednesday

PTI

launched 2.8 Mach surface attack missile of this category on a sea target on November 22, 2017.

"Today's was the second such live launch of the weapon. The integration of the weapon on the aircraft was a very complex process involving mechanical, electrical and software modifications on aircraft," the IAF said.

It said the software development of the aircraft was undertaken by IAF engineers, while the HAL carried out mechanical and electrical modifications on it.

"The dedicated and synergetic efforts of the IAF, Defence Research and Development Organisation, BrahMos Aerospace Ltd and HAL have proven the capability of the nation to undertake such complex integrations," the IAF said.

Continued on Page 7

Govt OK's elevation of 4 judges to SC as court sticks to names

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government is learnt to have cleared the names of four judges for their elevation to the Supreme Court, sources said Wednesday.

Once the appointments formally come through, the top court will have its full sanctioned strength of 31 judges (including the chief justice). As of now, the apex court is functioning with 27 judges.

The four names cleared by the Government are justices Aniruddha Bose, AS Bopanna, BR Gavai and Surya Kant.

The names of justices Bose and Bopanna were earlier returned by the Government to the SC collegium citing seniority and representation of regions as the reasons. But in its resolution passed earlier this month, the collegium had reiterated its recommendation



Justice Ranjan Gogoi.

to elevate justices Bose and Bopanna to the apex court, observing that nothing adverse has been found regarding their competence, conduct or integrity.

The collegium had also recommended the names of justices BR Gavai and Surya Kant for elevation to the apex court. The five-member Collegium is headed by Chief

Justice Ranjan Gogoi. Sources aware of the development said the notification is expected by Thursday morning once the President signs their warrant of appointment.

Justice Bose, whose parent high court is Calcutta, is the Chief Justice of Jharkhand High Court and is at number 12 in all-India seniority of judges. Justice Bopanna, whose parent high court is Karnataka, is the Gauhati High Court Chief Justice and stands at number 36.

Justice Gavai is a judge of the Bombay High Court and Justice Kant is the incumbent Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court.

CAPSULE

SON CHOPS FATHER'S BODY INTO 25 PIECES

New Delhi: Following heated argument over property dispute, a 22-year-old boy allegedly killed his father in Delhi's Shahdara district. After killing his father, accused Aman had kept his father's body at home for two days, before chopping his father's body into 25 pieces. Aman, along with his friend, was arrested from outside his home in the early hours of Wednesday in Shahdara's Bada Bazaar area when he was about to leave to dispose off the body parts kept in a bag in a car.

KILL NON-MUSLIMS IN INDIA: MASOOD AZHAR

New Delhi: Rattled by the projected outcome of the exit polls in India, Maulana Masood Azhar, Jaish-e-Mohammad chief, has directed his followers to attack non-Muslims in India. The audio message was issued a day after the exit polls during Ramzan khutbah wherein he prayed for success of jihadis.

All eyes on contest between BJP, SP-BSP alliance

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With exit polls predicting a tough contest between the BJP and SP-BSP-RLD alliance in UP, all eyes will be on the counting of votes for 80 Lok Sabha seats in the state on Thursday. The counting of votes will start at 8 am on Thursday and continue till the announcement of results late in the evening.

Along with counting for Lok Sabha elections, counting of votes for Agra North and Nighasan Assembly bypolls will also be taken up on Thursday.

For Lok Sabha poll counting, a total of 77 counting centres have been set up by the Election Commission in Uttar Pradesh. Counting of votes for Azamgarh and Kushinagar Lok Sabha seats will be conducted at two centres each while one counting centre has been set up for the rest of 73 Lok Sabha seats.

In UP, a total of over 1.63 lakh polling booths were set up and 979 candidates were in the fray for 80 Lok Sabha seats in UP. UP's chief electoral officer Venkateshwar Lu said in Lucknow on Wednesday that the strong rooms where EVMs have been stored would be opened in the presence of candidates or their authorised representatives before being taken to counting centres.

For each Assembly segment, 14 counting tables and one table for assistant returning officer have been set up. The CEO said that each candidate was permitted to have one counting agent on each table.

A counting supervisor, along with one assistant, will look after the process and the micro-observer from among Central government officers will also be there. Before counting of each EVM, the seal on the machine will be checked and its number will tallied with the record of EVM.

The CEO further said that the Election Commission had already banned victory processions and other celebrations.

Prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the CrPC have been imposed in all districts and liquor shops across the state will remain closed for the day on Thursday.

"We have imparted training to counting personnel and they have been asked to strict-



Lucknow DM Kaushal Raj Sharma taking the stock of the preparations at Ramabai ground on Wednesday

VVPAT slips to be counted if EVMs not cleared of mock poll data

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Election Commission has decided to count VVPAT slips if the data of mock drill earlier was not deleted from electronic voting machines (EVMs). UP's chief electoral officer Veknateshwar Lu said in Lucknow that it was reported that in some places, presiding officers had forgotten to delete mock poll votes before the actual voting, which could result in a difference between votes recorded in EVMs and VVPAT slips.

The CEO said that count-

ing of VVPAT slips of five booths in each Assembly segment would be taken up at the end of counting process.

"The EC has decided that in case mock poll votes were not deleted from the EVMs, the VVPAT slips would be counted and it would be final," the CEO said.

He said if there was any technical flaw leading to non-opening of EVMs, VVPAT slips would be counted then too. The counting personnel will have to count 1,63,484 EVMs in 80 Lok Sabha seats where polling was held at the same number of booths.

ly adhere to rules, regulations and guidelines issued by Election Commission. Trends will be available after completion of a round of counting while results would be declared after approval from the EC. The results would be late this time as five booths in each Assembly segment of a Lok Sabha constituency will be examined with VVPAT slips," the CEO said.

"This time, counting of postal ballot will take more time as poll personnel will

have to record it with bar code of the ballot. On the request of counting agents, recounting of votes can be ordered by the returning officer and central observers of a particular booth," he said.

Adequate security measures have been made at the counting centres across 75 districts and in sensitive districts, 200 companies of Central Paramilitary Forces and 100 companies of PAC, along with over two lakh district police personnel, have been deployed to

A total of 147 central counting observers would be deployed to monitor the entire process.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi (Varanasi), UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi (Rae Bareilly), Congress president Rahul Gandhi (Amethi), Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh (Lucknow), Samajwadi Party patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav (Mainpuri), and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav (Azamgarh), along with several Union ministers and Bollywood stars, contested from various seats of UP.

"The present set of leaders running the UPCC do not have a strong political background and it adversely affects the party's performance as a main opposition party in UP. Besides, senior and loyal party leaders have stopped visiting the office," he lamented.

In a bid to improve the state of affairs in UP, the leader said: "This trend can be done away with and the party be revived only if a new team with adequate experience and energy is put in place. Since Priyanka is in charge of UP East, her presence and leadership should help in rejuvenation and we can hope for a better result in the 2022 Assembly polls."

UP Congress set for major revamp

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The results of Lok Sabha elections notwithstanding, UP Congress is set for a major revamp in near future.

"During her maiden interaction with party workers and leaders, Congress general secretary and UP East incharge Priyanka Gandhi had said that she was unhappy with the present set-up in the state, but added that the party would go with the same set-up as polls were near," a Congress leader from Rae Bareilly pointed out.

The Congress leader said that during poll campaigning, Priyanka also witnessed that the organisation was almost non-existent in the state and she single-handedly managed the campaign hoping for the best results.

"Priyanka witnessed how the outfit was being handled by the state brass over the years, which naturally reflected on the party's poll performance. She will now come with a new set of leaders to run the party effectively in the state," the leader said.

A former Congress MLA claimed that a revamp in the UPCC was the need of the hour as every second leader visiting the party headquarters was being included in the media team even as the party failed to corner the BJP for its wrong policies and failures.

"The present set of leaders running the UPCC do not have a strong political background and it adversely affects the party's performance as a main opposition party in UP. Besides, senior and loyal party leaders have stopped visiting the office," he lamented.

In a bid to improve the state of affairs in UP, the leader said: "This trend can be done away with and the party be revived only if a new team with adequate experience and energy is put in place. Since Priyanka is in charge of UP East, her presence and leadership should help in rejuvenation and we can hope for a better result in the 2022 Assembly polls."

Rajbhar dismisses speculations of 3 SBSP MLAs joining BJP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

After the dismissal of Suheldeo Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP) president Om Prakash Rajbhar from the Yogi Adityanath Cabinet, trouble seems to be mounting for the sacked minister.

While three SBSP MLAs are rumoured to be deserting him for the ruling BJP, the Estate department has issued notice to Rajbhar to vacate the ministerial bungalow within next 15 days.

The SBSP chief, however, denied that his party MLAs were joining the BJP. "An organised disinformation campaign is being unleashed against me and my party by the BJP. There is no truth to the speculations that SBSP MLAs will leave the party. It's just a rumour. We are together since the days we launched our struggle for the rights and emancipation of the poor, OBCs and disadvantaged sections of the society. There is no question of party MLAs deserting the movement," Rajbhar asserted in a tweet on Wednesday.

Founded in 2002, the SBSP had won four of the eight Assembly seats it contested in 2017 Assembly elections in alliance with the BJP. SBSP chief Om Prakash Rajbhar got a Cabinet berth in the Yogi Adityanath Cabinet.



Ever since his induction into the UP Cabinet in March 2017, Rajbhar has been at loggerheads with the BJP and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. He came to be known for making critical statements against the BJP, its brass and the Chief Minister as well.

In April this year, Rajbhar sent his resignation from the Cabinet to the CM and later announced to field 39 candidates on his party symbol in eastern UP Lok Sabha seats.

Ahead of the last phase of polling on May 19, Rajbhar

went to the extent of asking his cadres to beat up BJP leaders with shoes.

A day later, on May 20, Rajbhar was dismissed from the Cabinet while seven SBSP leaders, earlier appointed as chairmen of various corporations ahead of the notification of Lok Sabha elections on March 10, were also dismissed.

Reacting to the speculations, SBSP sources said that three MLAs could form a new group and merge the party with the BJP or could directly join the BJP. Anti-defection law would not be applicable to them as they would make up for three-fourths of the party strength, they added.

The sources further claimed that the MLAs were annoyed with Rajbhar for ignoring them and promoting his family members within the party. All the three SBSP MLAs in question — Triveni Ram from Jakhania Assembly seat (Ghazipur), Kailash Nath Sonkar from Ajghara seat of Varanasi, and Ramanand Baudh from Ramkola seat in Kushinagar — are Dalits.

NOTICE

This is for general information to public that myself Sanjay Singh S/o Late Shri Rameshwar Prasad Singh R/O House No. K-1026, Ashyana Colony Kanpur Road, Lucknow having property at K-1026, Ashyana Colony Kanpur Road, Lucknow it's sale deed dated 30.08.1997 which is duly registered in the office of Sub-Registrar Lucknow at Serial No. 8271, Bahi No. 1, 2d No. 1886 on page 1772/20, letter dated 04.05.2019 is missing. For which FIR has been lodged on Gosaiganj in police station Gosaiganj Lucknow. The property is presently owned by me which has been purchased by me from Smt. Neena Saxena W/o. R.K. Saxena R/O. 17A, Nehru Nagar, district-Agra, on which I am intended to avail Education Loan from SBI Jawahar Bhawan branch, Lucknow. If any person having any right in the claim, share etc. then please communicate the same within 15 days to branch Manager, SBI Jawahar Bhawan Lucknow-226001, Landline No. 0522-2286881 otherwise same will be considered void.

North Central Railway, Allahabad

Tender Notice
E-Tender No. ALD-Sig-35-2019-20
Senior Divisional Signal & Telecommunication Engineer / Coordination / North Central Railway/ Allahabad, for and on behalf of the President of India, invite E-TENDER on prescribed form for the following works up to 12.00 hrs. on 12.06.2019. The detail of the Tender is as under: - S.N. 1. Tender No. ALD -Sig-35-2019-20. Name of Work/ Hiring of One Nos. Non AC multi utility vehicle i.e Tavera/Eriga/Xylo or similar in perfectly good condition based at ALJN on 24 hours basis for the usage up to 2000 km per month as per special conditions of contract for a period of 24 months for the use of ADSTE/ALJN. Approx. Cost of work (₹): 828840/-, Earnest Money (₹): 166000/-, Cost of Tender Form (₹): 2,000/-, Completion Period: 24 Months. Date of Closing of tender: 12.06.2019. 2. Availability of tender form: Tender forms shall be available on www.ireps.gov.in 21 days prior to date of opening of the tender. 3. Earnest Money to be deposited: The prescribed amount of Earnest Money as mentioned above must be deposited along with the tender form Online through Internet Banking or Online Payment gateway only. The tenderer(s) should note that, in any case, the Earnest Money in any other form than specified above shall not be acceptable. Tenders without earnest money shall be summarily rejected. 4. Time date & place of opening of tender: Tender will be opened through E-tender at office of Divisional Railway Manager, Allahabad on or after pre determined date at 12.30 hours. In case tender opening date happens to be holiday, Tenders will be opened on the next working day. 5. Validity of offer: 45 days from the date of opening. 6. Right of Railway to deal with tender: Railway administration reserves the rights to postpone/modify or to cancel the tender without assigning any reasons. 684/19 Ad 24x7 Passenger Helpline No :- 138

Army of SP, BSP 'chowkidars' guarding strong rooms

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

An army of Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party 'chowkidars' has been keeping a round-the-clock vigil on all strong rooms in 75 districts across Uttar Pradesh.

"We have already directed party leaders in each district to deploy workers to keep a vigil on the strong rooms in each district," SP spokesman Rajendra Chaudhary said in Lucknow on Wednesday.

The army of 'chowkidars' includes workers and supporters of SP and BSP. Chaudhary said that the party decided to deploy its workers outside strong rooms as the opposition parties had no faith in the Election Commission and BJP government.

"The opposition parties decided to step up vigil on strong rooms in the aftermath of videos circulating on social media showing alleged movement and tampering of EVMs in Ghazipur, Chandauli, Mau, and Jhansi districts," the SP spokesman said.

Some supporters are even residing in makeshift tents and guarding the strong rooms in eight-hour shifts. "The workers have been given assigned different roles like keeping a tab on CCTV feed from outside the strong rooms on their monitors, watching activities near or inside the premises through binoculars or going near barricades from time to time using the passes issued for the purpose," said the SP leader.

However, UP's chief electoral officer Venkateshwar Lu allayed the fears of EVM tampering. "There are CCTV cameras installed in strong rooms and candidates are allowed to keep a watch through their representatives. All the apprehensions are unfounded," he insisted.

BJP to take action against non-performing legislators

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The state unit of Bharatiya Janata Party is set to take action against ministers and legislators in whose constituencies the party did not perform as expected and the non-performing ministers could be replaced by those who excelled.

A senior BJP leader told *The Pioneer* in Lucknow on Wednesday that the Lok Sabha election results would be under scrutiny because of the impotency attached by party's brass to Uttar Pradesh. Preparations were made to the minutest of details and a team of party workers worked as a well-oiled machine for months. "We are still confident of winning 74 seats and results notwithstanding, the whole thing will be scrutinised. Targets were given to legislators and we will see whether the same were achieved as per party's expectation," the leader said.

Majority of exit polls have predicted that the BJP would lose some seats in UP but win in the

excess of 50. The internal survey of BJP, however, said that the party would win 67 of the 78 seats contested, as two seats were left for its ally Apna Dal. In 2014 elections, the BJP and its ally won 73 out of 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh.

The BJP is taking the results seriously as over a dozen Union and UP ministers contested the elections from UP. The main contenders were Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Varanasi, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh from Lucknow, Union Minister of Social Justice Menaka Gandhi from Sultanpur, Union minister Sadhavi Niranan Jyoti from Fatehpur, Union Minister of State for Railways Manoj Sinha from Ghazipur, Union minister Gen (Retd) VK Singh from Ghaziabad, Mahesh Sharma from Gautam Budh Nagar, Union minister Santosh Gangwar from Bareilly, Union Textile Minister Smriti Irani from Amethi and Sanjiv Baliyan from Muzaffarnagar.

Among ministers in the Yogi government, Tourism minister

and MLA from Lucknow Cantt Rita Bahuguna Joshi contested the Allahabad seat while Khadi and Gramodyog Minister Satyadev Pachauri was in the fray from Kanpur, replacing Murlu Manohar Joshi.

Besides, Animal Husbandry Minister SPS Baghel contested from Agra and Co-operative minister Mukut Bihari Verma tried his luck from Ambedkar Nagar. Even state BJP president Mahendra Pandey contested from Chandauli.

"When so many ministers and dignitaries were in the fray, we need to assess the performance of our leaders on how they fared," the BJP leader said, and hinted that Yogi could go for a Cabinet reshuffle to replace the non-performing ministers with those who came out with flying colours.

Earlier, at a poll rally in Mahoba, the Chief Minister had made it clear that he would take action against officials after elections and was dissatisfied over the faulty delivery system, particularly in the Bundelkhand region.

NHRC notice to DGP over custodial death in Kannauj

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) issued notice to the UP DGP over the death of a person in police custody in Kannauj.

The NHRC took suo motu cognisance of media reports that the man died after being thrashed in police custody in

Kannauj on May 20, after which a case was registered against three cops, including the police station incharge.

The Commission observed that contents of news reports, if true, raised serious issue of human rights violation.

Accordingly, it issued a notice to the UP DGP on Wednesday, seeking a detailed report after

a probe by not less than an officer of SSP rank (of another district), status of criminal cases registered against the errant police personnel within four weeks and relief, if any, provided to the family of the deceased.

It further observed that it appeared the police acted in a cruel manner, which was tan-

amount to violation of the victim's human rights. The Commission felt that the police personnel failed to perform lawful duty as instead of providing protection to the man in custody, they abused their powers.

On Wednesday, Ravindra Kumar and his brother Devendra were taken to police

station over a property issue. Devendra was released in an hour but Ravindra was detained and beaten up in custody by the cops. His kin were not allowed to meet him and later, he was dumped outside his house by cops in an injured condition. Later, Ravindra succumbed to injuries.

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Tight security arrangements in place for counting of votes



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Elaborate security arrangements have been made in and around the Ramabai Rally Sthal for counting of votes on Thursday. SSP Kalanidhi Naithani will monitor the law and order situation along with senior officers. The SSP said general public would not be allowed to go beyond 500 metres of counting venue.

If political parties wanted to hold celebratory functions, they must remain confined to their offices and not come out on the roads to cause traffic jam or incite violence.

Meanwhile, District Magistrate Kaushal Raj Sharma carried out an inspection of the venue along with senior officials and observer of Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency Shaileendra Singh and that of Mohanlalraj Sharad Laxman.

The DM made a detailed inspection of the venue and also looked into the arrangements which had been made for the counting of votes which he said had been completed.

The DM said that all the tables had been placed for the counting and wire meshes had been put around those where the VVPAT slips would be counted in keeping with the fact that they did not fly around. The DM went into every room which had been allotted to each constituency and checked the lighting arrangements there. He said that looking at the weather conditions they were making arrangements for water within the premises and there were water coolers which had been fitted into the rooms.

The DM, who is also the district election officer, said that an ambulance would also be placed at the venue. There would be a primary health centre and a fire brigade which would also stand at the venue, he added. "A media centre with arrangements for coolers and proper Wi-Fi connectivity has also been established," he added.

He said that there would be



(Clockwise from top) DM Kaushal Raj Sharma inspecting Ramabai Rally Sthal on Wednesday; seating arrangements at counting venue; barricades set up to prevent the entry of general public; and a security personnel stands guard at the site

separate gates for the Lucknow Lok Sabha and Mohanlalraj Lok Sabha constituencies and two persons would be deployed at each of them. The DM said that neither mobile phones nor electronic gadgets would be allowed inside the premises and these items would be deposited at the gate for all those who want to enter the premises.

Kaushal Raj Sharma further said that all the counting parties would reach the venue by 6 am and the counting would commence by 8 am. He said that the counting of the postal as well as the service ballots would also begin by 8 am and the counting of the VVPATs would take place after the counting of EVMs.

He said that the counting staff whose duty was at the Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency had been directed to reach the same gate and those who had to do duty at the Mohanlalraj Lok Sabha constituency would do their duty at this gate. It was further informed that at the counting table there would be one supervisor, one micro observ-

er, one class IV employee, one counting assistant and one counting agent who had been selected by the candidate who would also look into the process of counting.

The DM said that they had kept 14 tables as per the Vidhan Sabha constituency and one table of the AERO and so there would be 70 counting tables in the Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency with 5 AERO tables and six tables for service voters and five for the postal ballots and one table would be for the RO.

He said that in the case of Mohanlalraj Lok Sabha constituency there would be 14 counting tables and one table for the AERO for each Vidhan Sabha constituency and hence there would be a total of 56 counting tables and four tables for the AERO. There would be 10 tables for the service voters and three for the ballot voters and one table for the RO.

The DM said that for the VVPAT counting separate tables would be kept. For each Vidhan Sabha constituency they would be keeping one table for the counting of

VVPATs which would be surrounded by wire meshes so that the slips did not fly. He said that one person would sit on the table and there would be nine tables for the counting of VVPATs. Sharma said that five VVPATs per Lok Sabha constituency would be taken out through a lottery system for the counting of votes. He said that the control units of those EVMs which were not cleared after the mock poll by mistake would not be counted and only their VVPATs would be counted.

He said that smoking was prohibited at the venue and no one could use gutka or tobacco there either. He said that when the counting of any control unit was completed it would be given to the AERO who would then seal it. The DM said that no sharp-edged weapons or inflammable substances could be brought at the venue by any person. While issuing instructions to the counting personnel, he said that they would be allotted the table as per the letter which had been issued to them. He said that they should ensure that the EVM which had been allotted

to them was as per the round which was being announced.

He said that the address on the carrying case of the EVM machine should be matched with the booth and the polling agent should also be informed that the machine was from which booth. "The control unit of the machine should be taken out from the carrying case and it should be taken into account that the pink paper seal, strip seal and the green paper seal and all green paper seals are as per the number series. The strip seal should be cut in a careful manner so that the series number of the green paper seal remains intact."

The DM said that the result button should be pressed without taking out the special tag. "When the result button is pressed then the display unit will show the total number of votes which had been cast and the series will be displayed as per the series of the candidates. One should be careful that once the display is carried out then it is shown to the micro observer and the polling agent," he said. The DM said that the votes should be announced by

the observers in such a manner that the polling agent and the counting assistant could listen to it properly.

Issuing the instructions for the postal ballots, he said that the counting personnel should ensure whether the series number was present on both the envelopes or not and if it was not present there then they should reject that particular ballot. "They should then take out the 13 A declaration form of the voter and see whether his name, address and the signatures as well as the address of the gazetted officer as well as the voter were there or not. It will also be seen whether the designation of the gazetted officer is given or not and if any of these details are missing then the ballot will be rejected and a seal of 'rejected' will be put on it," he added. He said that in the ballot paper if the voter has put a correct sign in front of one name and cross in front of the other candidates then his or her ballot should be cancelled. He said that if any portion of the form was cut and appeared to be a photocopy then also the ballot should be rejected.

Candidates relaxed on D-Day eve



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

A day before the counting for Lok Sabha elections, the candidates from the Lucknow appeared relaxed and spent their day without too much of tension.

Pankaj Singh, son of Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, told *The Pioneer* that his father was busy in several meetings in Delhi but there was a lot of enthusiasm at the party level and they were confident of a good victory margin. "We are expecting the margin to be more than that in the previous Lok Sabha elections (2.72 lakh)," he said. When asked whether his family was visiting any temple to offer prayers on the counting eve, he said they would do it after declaration of results.

Congress candidate Acharya Pramod Krishnam said he was following his daily routine in usual manner. He said he was neither tense nor excited about the results.

He said that the worry he was facing was about the system losing its credibility and faith, which is vital in case of a democracy.

"There is a strange atmosphere for this election and the faith which people should have in the democratic system was disappearing. This is very dangerous for any country. This is not a question of EVMs and VVPATs, and it does not bother me as to who will win or who will lose, but what is important is that the confidence in the democratic system is breaking down. I do not want put level allegations on anyone for the system breakdown," he added.

Asked whether he was offering prayers at any temple, he said prayers, *sadhana* and *bhajans* were something he did routinely.

Girish Pandey, a former IRS officer who also contested the elections, said he spent the day helping his son who would be appearing for JEE (Advanced). "My son has got 99 percentile and I am helping him prepare for exams. My three daughters are also software engineers. I try to keep



Girish Pandey (top) and Mohammed Faheem with their respective families

my focus on family even as I do other works," he added.

Mohammed Faheem of Indian National League said he was not worried about the results. "I know that the contest is primarily between the BJP, Congress and SP-BSP. However, I have the confidence that I gave one vote to myself and not to any corrupt politician. We will see how many Muslims voted for me," he said. There are 15 candidates from Lucknow and 12 from Mohanlalraj Lok Sabha constituencies. Apart from Rajnath Singh, Acharya Pramod Krishnam and Poonam Sinha, other candidates include Amar Kumar Raizada from Akhil Bharatiya Sangh, Ganesh Chowdhary from Saaf Party, Girish Narayanan Pandey from Sarvodaya Bharat Party, Kapil Mohan Chowdhary from Mera Adhikar Rashtriya Dal, Ram Sagar Pal from Awami Samta Party, Shamim Khan from Nagrik Ekta Party, Prof DNS Yadav from People's Party of Democrats, Avinash Chandra Jain and Jimidar Singh Yadav (independents).

In Mohanlalraj, the candidates include Kaushal Kishore from BJP, CL Verma from BSP-SP, RK Chowdhary from Congress, Jagdish Prasad Rawat from Manavata Samajwadi Party, Ganesh Rawat from Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia), Radha Ambedkar from People's Party of India, Ram Sagar Pasi from Samdarshi Samaj Party, Shatrohan Lal Rawat from Shastriya Lok Dal, Sushil Kumar, and independents Jagdish Rawat, Prabhawati Devi & Ramesh Kumar.

CM reviews progress of dev schemes, wheat purchase

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

After a hectic poll campaign spanning over a month-and-a-half, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is back to business holding closed-door meetings with officials to review the progress of development schemes and enquire about the ongoing projects.

A senior official told *The Pioneer* in Lucknow on Wednesday that the Chief Minister called some officials at his official residence and enquired about wheat purchase centres and progress in purchase at those centres as well as progress in the construction of Purvanchal and Bundelkhand expressways.

In the first week of March, the UP government increased wheat procurement target by 10 per cent, as compared to last year, to 55 lakh metric tonne, for the 2019 Rabi season which began from April 1.

Besides, the government increased the minimum support price (MSP) of wheat by more than 6 per cent (from Rs 1,735 per quintal to Rs 1,840 per quintal). The government will also pay a bonus of Rs 20 per quintal for wheat chaffing, raising the effective payment to Rs 1,860 per quintal.

In 2018, the state government had purchased 53 lakh tonne wheat against a target of 50 lakh tonne. During the



Akhilesh regime in 2017, the state government agencies had procured 37 lakh tonne wheat as compared to 8 lakh tonne in 2016.

The review followed reports suggesting wheat procurement in the state had plummeted by almost 40 per cent to 27 lakh tonne from over 37 lakh tonne during the corresponding period last year.

The official said that questions were being raised on the decline in purchase despite 6,000 centres being set up by the state government across the state for direct purchase of wheat from farmers. In fact, the government had announced that procurement agencies would continue purchasing wheat from farmers even if the season's target was

achieved during April 1 and June 15, 2019. However, the government failed to meet the target.

Yogi was told that so far, nearly 27 lakh tonne wheat had been procured from 5,30,000 farmers, who were paid over Rs 5,000 crore directly in their bank accounts. Nearly, 6,755 procurement centres are operational across the state.

"Officials should now pull up their socks. The elections are over and they should focus on the administrative work," the CM said. Sources say that the CM also discussed appointment of 68,500 assistant teachers, an issue which is pending in court. The CM asked the officials to ensure that the issue was resolved at the earliest.

Toddler crushed by mini-truck driven by father

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

In a tragic incident, a two-year-old girl, identified as Nazneena Khatoon, was crushed under the wheels of a mini-truck being driven by her father in Pantnagar under Indira Nagar police station on Wednesday morning. She died on the spot. She was the daughter of Mohammad Lalchand Ali, a native of Assam working on contractual basis with Eco-Green, Nagar Nigam.

Police said the girl was rushed to Dr Ram Manohar Lohiya Hospital by her father's co-workers and locals but the doctors declared her brought dead. The police said she came under the wheels of mini-truck driven by her father after she slipped from the stairs of the second floor of an apartment as her mother Arna Khatoon had gone there to collect garbage from the houses.

The couple used to accompany their daughter, who was their only child, while leaving their makeshift house in Sudh area of Khurramnagar. Her mother took her along while going to collect garbage from the house in an apartment, but the girl stood on the stairs. She accidentally slipped and came under the wheels of a mini-truck when her father was backing up the vehicle. Ali had come to the state capital four years ago and got married to Arna Khatoon, also a native of Assam, three years back.

Man who duped several on pretext of selling plots arrested after two years

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

A fraudster, who had been on the lam for two years, ran out of luck in the wee hours of Wednesday. Police arrested the person, was accused of having duped several people on the pretext of selling residential plots to them in prime locations of the state capital and adjoining districts. The victims got nothing but assurance despite several reminders and requests even though they were depositing monthly installments on a regular basis.

The accused was identified as Ashish Srivastava (52), a native of Barabanki presently living in Gomti Nagar. He was picked up by the police near Husadia crossing in the wee hours when he was about to leave for some place to avoid arrest and interrogation.

The police said he set up a registered firm known as 'R and Infrastructure Developers' and had the office in Gomti Nagar area. He used to book the plots on the condition that an individual had to deposit Rs 18,000 in advance and Rs 4,000 per month for a period of seven years. The fraud surfaced when the people were deprived

of possession even after completing the formalities and regular monthly installments.

Initially, he used to claim that the plots would be handed over to the buyers in a couple of days. The buyers were in for a surprise when they found his office locked one day in 2017. Then decided to lodge a complaint at the Gomti Nagar police station last year.

A probe conducted by the police found that the accused had cheated people by taking cash running into nearly Rs 500 crore. A case was registered and a manhunt was launched against him.

On Tuesday night, an tipped off Gomti Nagar inspector Ram Surat Sonkar that the accused had been spotted near his residence close to Seth MR Jaipuria School.

A plan was worked out to nab him and cops in civvies were deployed in and around the area. A white luxury car was spotted in the wee hours near Husadia crossing with the accused in the driver's seat. He tried to speed off as he realised that he was surrounded by the police. But, he was nabbed after a chase. The police said he had taken money money over 60 persons.



There was no let-up in heat as the maximum temperature in Lucknow settled at 42.1 degree Celsius, which was a couple of notches above normal



CISH, CIIPM to conduct survey on red-banded caterpillar soon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

The Central Institute of Subtropical Horticulture (CISH) in collaboration with the Central Institute of Integrated Pest Management, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Lucknow, is going to organise a survey for the incidence of red-banded caterpillar and stone weevil in Lucknow, Hardoi, Unnao and Barabanki districts from May 24 to 26.

CISH director Shailendra Rajan said that the mango crop had been suffering from many insects, pests and diseases which were endemic to mango belts in Uttar Pradesh. "The farmers are very well aware about the identification of these pests and their management. However, some pests like the red-banded caterpillar and stone weevil

are considered quarantine pests and make an impact economically. All the efforts are made to restrict them in the areas of their occurrence to avoid severe losses in the new areas. These pests are of great importance for the export of mango fruits because no country allows imports from the infested areas," he added.

The red-banded caterpillar has not been found in many parts of India. But it is a serious pest of mango in Australia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Burma, Thailand, China, Brunei, and the Philippines. In India this pest has been reported from Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal and Bihar indicating its seriousness in eastern India.

"The damage to the crop in eastern Uttar Pradesh from a similar caterpillar is consid-

ered as serious by the local farmers and requires its confirmation. Red-banded caterpillar has never been observed in the surroundings of Lucknow yet the possibility of incidence of this pest in UP cannot be ruled out. Since it is an emerging pest it requires a lot of awareness for its identification and proper management, if found. The survey aims to confirm its occurrence in major mango-growing belts of UP, including Saharanpur, Bulandshahr, Pratapgarh, Lucknow, Hardoi, Unnao and Barabanki districts," said the official.

The mango stone weevil is also a serious quarantine pest of mango which affects both its fruit and seed quality. "After hatching, the larva burrows through the flesh and into the seed. As fruit and seed

entry are completely obliterated so that later on it is impossible to distinguish the infested from the non-infested seeds unless they are cut open. Inside the infested stone the cotyledons turn black and remain merely a rotten mass. Seeds, in which the embryo is damaged and the reserve food in the cotyledons is greatly reduced, fail to germinate," he said.

The CISH director said that though the mango stone weevil originated from the Indo-Burma sub-region it also occurred in Asia, Australia, Oceania, North, South and Central America as well as Africa. In India the northern plains are free from its infestation. It is important to monitor its infestation to boost mango exports. This survey will help in ensuring pest-free areas.

IISR, ITM varsity sign MoU for academic interaction



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

The Indian Institute of Sugarcane Research, Lucknow, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the ITM University, Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, on Wednesday for the purpose of academic interaction. The research capability and state-of-the-art facility available with the IISR was recognised by the ITM University, Gwalior, and they decided to have collaboration with this premier institute of sugarcane research for training and human resource development of students/faculties in cutting-edge areas of cane research.

The media spokesperson of IISR, AK Sah, said that from now on students of ITM University, Gwalior, pursuing their BSc (Ag), MSc (Ag), B.Tech, M.Tech and PhD would have the opportunity to work with the scientists of different disciplines in the Institute. "This will provide the student's ample opportunity to learn and update themselves in advance areas of research in sugarcane, technology of sugarcane production, processing and development areas of sugarcane sector in the country. This will sharpen the edge of the students for making a career in the sugarcane and sugar sector of the country. At the same time faculties of ITM

will also be benefited by academic interaction with the scientists of the IISR in advance areas of research," he added. As per the MoU the IISR will provide periodic training as required for the fulfilment of course work under different programmes of the University at nominal charges by the Institute from time to time. "The scientists and officers of the Institute on their individual merit and in accordance with the University rules and regulations will be recognised as co-guide for guiding research. The University will now invite the IISR scientists and experts to deliver guest lectures as per requirement in various courses," he said.

उत्तर प्रदेश पावर ट्रांसमिशन कारपोरेशन लिमिटेड ई-निविदा सूचना निम्नलिखित ई-निविदा जिनका संक्षिप्त विवरण नीचे दिया गया है, ई-निविदा की वेबसाइट www.etender.up.nic.in पर अपलोड कर दी गई है: अल्पकालीन ई-निविदा संख्या :- टी-06/2019-20, प्रस्तावानुसार 220 के०वी० उपकेंद्र नौकरोरी पर 100 एम०वी०ए० परिवर्तक प्रथम को हटाकर 160 एम०वी०ए० परिवर्तक की स्थापना का कार्य। उपरोक्त विषय में विस्तृत विवरण साईट पर उपलब्ध है सभी सक्षम आपूर्ति/कार्यदायी संस्थाएं तदनुसार निविदा में भाग ले सकती हैं। अधीक्षण अभियन्ता विद्युत परेषण मण्डल-द्वितीय, पनकी, कानपुर। संख्या : 381, दिनांक :- 22.05.2019 "राष्ट्रहित में बिजली बचाये"

उ०प्र० पावर ट्रांसमिशन कारपोरेशन लिमिटेड ई-निविदा संख्या-10 से 15-ई०टी०सी० (सी०)/2019-20 अनुवी फर्मों/उपकेंद्रों/अधिकृत विक्रेताओं/निर्माताओं से जो ई-प्रोक्वोरमेंट वेबसाइट www.etender.up.nic.in में पंजीकृत हो निम्नलिखित कार्य/आपूर्ति हेतु मोहर बन्द निविदाओं को मांगों में निविदा खुलने की तिथि/दिनांक के 12:00 बजे तक आमंत्रित की जाती है, जो उसी दिन क्रमशः 15:00 बजे मांग-1 एवं 16:00 बजे मांग-2 सार्वजनिक रूप से अधोस्ताहककर्ता के कार्यालय में निविदादाता/उनके अधिकृत प्रतिनिधियों को उपस्थित होना चाहे के समझ, अधोस्ताहकरी/उनके अधिकृत प्रतिनिधि द्वारा आनलाइन खोली जायेगी। यदि निविदा खुलने की तिथि पर अवकाश पड़ता है तो निविदा अगले कार्य दिवस पर निर्धारित समय तक स्वीकार की जायेगी एवं निर्धारित समय पर खोली जायेगी। मांग-1 में निविदा प्रश्न मूल्य (नान रिफ़्लेक्टिव) एवं धरोहर धनराशि जो कि S.E. ETC, Varanasi के खाता संख्या 404500210942734 एवं IFSC कोड PUNB0404500 बैंक पंजाब नेशनल बैंक, शाखा मिथारोपुर, वाराणसी में अलग-अलग RTGS/NEFT द्वारा जमा करना होगा, किसी अन्य माध्यम से निविदा प्रश्न मूल्य एवं धरोहर धनराशि स्वीकार नहीं किया जायेगा। निविदा प्रश्न, पैक काई, व्यापार कर, जी०एस०टी० पंजीकरण एवं इन्कम टैक्स रिटर्न प्रश्न एवं समान कार्य का अनुभव प्रमाण पत्र की स्वयं प्रमाणित छायाप्रति एवं निविदा प्रश्न मूल्य, धरोहर धनराशि जमा करने का प्रमाण पत्र जो कि बैंक द्वारा प्राप्त हो, तथा तकनीकी बिड यदि कोई हो, संलग्न करना अनिवार्य है। मांग-2 में दरे एवं वाणिज्यक नियम व शर्तें होनी चाहिये। (1) अल्पकालिक ई-निविदा संख्या-10-ई०टी०सी०(सी०)/2019-20-220 के०वी० विद्युत उपकेंद्र सासुरी पर स्थापित 200 एम०वी०ए० परिवर्तक-प्रथम एवं द्वितीय हेतु प्रस्तावानुसार मन्वीकावर सिस्टम की स्थापना का कार्य। निविदा खुलने की तिथि-10.06.2019। निविदा प्रश्न का मूल्य-रु० 3300+594 (जी०एस०टी०@18%)/-धरोहर राशि-रु० 33000/- (रु० तीस हज़ार मात्र)। (2) अल्पकालिक ई-निविदा संख्या-11-ई०टी०सी०(सी०)/2019-20-132 के०वी० विद्युत उपकेंद्र कुरसाली पर सी०सी०टी०वी० सर्विसेस उपकरण की आपूर्ति एवं उसके स्थापना का कार्य। खुलने की तिथि-10.06.2019। निविदा प्रश्न का मूल्य-रु० 200+36 (जी०एस०टी०@18%)/-धरोहर राशि-रु० 2000/- (रु० दो हज़ार मात्र)। (3) अल्पकालिक ई-निविदा संख्या-12-ई०टी०सी०(सी०)/2019-20-132 के०वी० विद्युत उपकेंद्र मण्डूआडीह, राजा का तालाब एवं कुरसाली पर अवस्थित विभिन्न प्रकार के अग्निशमन उपकरणों की रि-फिलिंग, उसके क्षतिग्रस्त अवयवों को बदलने एवं परीक्षण का कार्य। खुलने की तिथि-10.06.2019। निविदा प्रश्न का मूल्य-रु० 200+36 (जी०एस०टी०@18%)/-धरोहर राशि-रु० 2000/- (रु० दो हज़ार मात्र)। (4) अल्पकालिक ई-निविदा संख्या-13-ई०टी०सी०(सी०)/2019-20-132 के०वी० विद्युत उपकेंद्र सी०एस०टी०वी० सर्विसेस उपकरण की आपूर्ति एवं उसके स्थापना का कार्य। खुलने की तिथि-12.06.2019। निविदा प्रश्न का मूल्य-रु० 200+36 (जी०एस०टी०@18%)/-धरोहर राशि-रु० 2000/- (रु० दो हज़ार मात्र)। (5) अल्पकालिक ई-निविदा संख्या-14-ई०टी०सी०(सी०)/2019-20-प्रस्तावानुसार 132 के०वी० विद्युत उपकेंद्र सिकन्दरपुर से 20 एम०वी०ए० 132/33 के०वी० परिवर्तक 132 के०वी० उपकेंद्र अहरोरा पर लाने के सम्बन्ध में। निविदा खुलने की तिथि-12.06.2019। निविदा प्रश्न का मूल्य-रु० 550+99 (जी०एस०टी०@18%)/-धरोहर राशि-रु० 5500/- (रु० पांच हज़ार मात्र)। (6) अल्पकालिक ई-निविदा संख्या-14-ई०टी०सी०(सी०)/2019-20-प्रस्तावानुसार 132 के०वी० विद्युत उपकेंद्र सैनी रावबंकी से 20 एम०वी०ए० 132/33 के०वी० परिवर्तक 132 के०वी० उपकेंद्र अहरोरा पर लाने के सम्बन्ध में। निविदा खुलने की तिथि-12.06.2019। निविदा प्रश्न का मूल्य-रु० 550+99 (जी०एस०टी०@18%)/-धरोहर राशि-रु० 5500/- (रु० पांच हज़ार मात्र)। (7) अल्पकालिक ई-निविदा संख्या-14-ई०टी०सी०(सी०)/2019-20-प्रस्तावानुसार 132 के०वी० विद्युत उपकेंद्र सैनी रावबंकी से 20 एम०वी०ए० 132/33 के०वी० परिवर्तक 132 के०वी० उपकेंद्र अहरोरा पर लाने के सम्बन्ध में। निविदा खुलने की तिथि-12.06.2019। निविदा प्रश्न का मूल्य-रु० 550+99 (जी०एस०टी०@18%)/-धरोहर राशि-रु० 5500/- (रु० पांच हज़ार मात्र)।

CITY BRIEFS



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The annual general meeting of Associated Chamber of Commerce and Industry Uttar Pradesh was held at Smriti Bhawan on Wednesday. President Vijay Acharya welcomed the participants and presented the significant achievements of the Chamber. He said that the Chamber had organised programmes and participated at Noida, Varanasi, Kanpur, Jhansi and other cities of the state. The Agra chapter of the Chamber is actively involved in resolving the problems of industries. Members from Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Prayagraj, Meerut, Ghaziabad,

Jhansi and Kanpur have invested in their industries and also significantly contributed towards export. The Chamber is in its silver jubilee year. Bhupendra Kumar Modi, the founder-president, said during the last 25 years, the Chamber, with the support of government and other stake-holders, had helped in improving industrial environment in Uttar Pradesh. "The Chamber has planned grand silver jubilee celebrations in November with the help of partner state and nation," he added. Secretary general Virendra Nath Gupta said that the Chamber had prepared a structured plan for sustained and contin-

uous industrial development of the state.

INTERNATIONAL BIODIVERSITY DAY

The State Biodiversity Board, along with Lucknow University's Zoology department, organised competitions for school students on the occasion of International Biodiversity Day on Wednesday. Experts said biodiversity encompasses the variety of all lives on earth. India is one of the 12 mega biodiversity countries of the world. With only 2.5% of the land area, India already accounts for 7.8% of the recorded species of the world. India is equally rich in traditional and indigenous knowledge, both coded and informal.

AWARDED

Siddharth Warrier, a final-year resident of Neurology department (SGPGI) has distinguished himself among the medical poets of the world and got awarded for his poetry on Limbic System. He went to London to participate in the 'International Hippocrates Conference for Medical Poetry'. "This is a matter of pride not only for SGPGI but also for the country," Dr UK Mishra from the Neurology department said.



SCHOOLSCAN



STUDENTS HONOURED

Lucknow Public Schools and Colleges organised a felicitation ceremony for meritorious students of Class XII of ISC, CBSE & UP boards, parents and teachers at Ram Lal Memorial auditorium in Vinamra Khand (Gomti Nagar) on Wednesday. ISC

SCHOLARSHIP

Vistrit Pandey, a student of City Montessori School, Gomti Nagar Campus I, has been offered admission by Drexel, a top US university, with a scholarship of US\$ 1,18,800. He will be receiving the scholarship during his four years of higher education. He has also been offered admission by eight more US universities, including Illinois Institute of Technology and University of Illinois with a scholarship of US\$ 90,000. Besides, Pennsylvania State University, University of Texas, Purdue University, Adelphi University, University of Dayton, and Penn State University have also offered admission to him.

Man shot at in Madaion, critical

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

A 42-year-old man, identified as Navin Tiwari, a resident of Ramlila ground in Naubasta area under Madaion police station, was shot at by two unidentified miscreants around 9 pm on Wednesday. He sustained injuries on jaw, left hand and shoulder and was rushed to KGMU Trauma Centre where his condition was said to be critical.

Police said the incident took place near a countryside liquor shop located in Aliganj (sector-A). Surprisingly, the police were unaware of the shooting incident before being bombarded with queries from mediapersons. Madaion inspector Santosh Kumar Singh came to know of the incident after which the police swung into action.



A police team found the contact number of the victim's father Durga Dutt Tiwari who confirmed that his son had been shot at. He was rushed to Dr Ram Manohar Lohiya Hospital from where he was referred to the KGMU Trauma Centre. He said the condition of his son was critical. The Madaion inspector rushed to the Trauma Centre where doctors told him that the victim was still bleeding and that he continued to be in a critical condition. Singh said he could not talk to the victim's father and other relatives much as they were in a state of shock and trauma. However, two locals who rushed Tiwari to the hospital told the inspector that they were unaware of the reason which led to the incident. But they added that the victim was in a drunken state. Singh said the police would record the statement of the victim when he was in a position to talk.

Abducted student rescued

PNS ■ ALLAHABAD

Six-year-old Ranveer Singh, son of Abhishek Singh, a contractor with the Prayagraj Development Authority (PDA) was abducted from a gymnasium situated on the PD Tandon Road here on Tuesday evening. The abductors demanded ₹3 crore as ransom for the release of the boy. However, the victim was recovered by the police late in the evening the same day from Suriyavan in Bhadohi.

According to a report, Ranveer, a student of class I at St Joseph's College (SJC) used to go to gymnasium for learning gymnastics. On Tuesday

evening he was dropped there by the driver of the contractor, Virendra. Thereafter, he went to his village at Jhuni.

At around 6:15 pm, the old driver of the contractor, Sanjay Yadav, a resident of Katka in Jhuni reached the gymnasium and picked up Ranveer from there on the pretext that his birthday was on Wednesday and hence he had to go for shopping. It may be pointed out here that Sanjay Yadav was dismissed from service by the contractor three months ago.

After some time Sanjay Yadav called his parents on their mobile phone and informed them that Ranveer has been abducted and

demanding ₹3 crore as ransom for his release. Mentally perturbed by this incident Abhishek met the police officials and informed them about it. The police officials immediately swung into action and constituted five teams to ensure the safe release of the abducted boy. On the basis of electronic surveillance, the police and special task force (STF) launched an operation, reached Suriyavan village near Bhadohi and managed to rescue the abducted boy from the clutches of his abductors. In the exchange of fire that followed, the driver, Sanjay Yadav, sustained a bullet injury and succumbed to it later.



Muslims taking part in a roza itar hosted in Aliganj on Wednesday

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY, ALLAHABAD

E-Tender No.: 02-Elect/G/ALD/19-20 E-Tender Notice Date: 17.05.2019 Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer/Gen./North Central Railway/ Allahabad, for and on behalf of the President of India invites the following E-Tenders on prescribed form for the following work up to 15:00 hrs on 13.06.2019. The details of the tender are as under:-

SN	Tender No.	Name of Work	Cost of work ₹	Earnest Money ₹	Duration of completion	Cost of tender form ₹
1	ELG-02-1920	Electrical works for maintenance of Driver and Guard Running room/Malgodam colony Allahabad for Two years.	2298402.38	46000.00	24 Months	3000.00
2	ELG-03-1920	Electrical works for Operation & Maintenance of CPC- Goods Shed area-Kanpur for Two years.	6617687.46	132400.00	24 Months	5400.00
3	ELG-04-1920	Hiring of 01 No. transport vehicle of make TATA 207 DI crew cab or similar for SSE/PS/Kanpur for two years.	766166.16	15400.00	24 Months	2000.00
4	ELG-05-1920	Hiring of truck under SSE/PL/Allahabad for two years.	1277292.24	25600.00	24 Months	2000.00
5	ELG-06-1920	Hiring of transport vehicle of make TATA 207 DI crew cab or similar over Allahabad division for one year.	1532332.32	30700.00	12 Months	2000.00
6	ELG-07-1920	Comprehensive Annual Maintenance Contract of Drinking Water Chiller Plants over Allahabad Division for three years.	2953343.89	59100.00	36 Months	3000.00
7	ELG-08-1920	Annual Maintenance Contract for three years of Arohi Lifts installed at Allahabad Railway Station & Kanpur Railway Station for three years.	851240.28	17000.00	36 Months	2000.00
8	ELG-09-1920	Engrisection of newly installed pump at Rifel range Tundia and Etah commercial line separation for anti theft measure.	1408749.40	28200.00	06 Months	2000.00
9	ELG-10-1920	Electrical Miscellaneous Maintenance works under SSE /PS/Etawah (from Phaphund to Jasantanagar & Etawah to Mainpuri section) for 02 Years.	4368134.66	87400.00	24 Months	3400.00
10	ELG-11-1920	Electrical works in connection with "Allahabad Division- Construction of new Crew Running Room at Kanpur"	7964254.10	159300.00	06 Months	5400.00
11	ELG-12-1920	Electrical works for "Allahabad Division: Provision of 20 bedded RPF Barracks at Firozabad, Phaphund & 10 bedded for Female staff at Allahabad & Kanpur along with provision of office for CIB & Dog, Squad & miscellaneous improvement works"	8428480.94	168600.00	06 Months	5400.00
12	ELG-13-1920	Part-A:- Electrical Works in connection with "Rura Tundia- Replacement of old roof by RCC roof in staff quarters between RRH (excluding) & Tundia (excluding)". Part-B:- Electrical Works in connection with "Tundia- Replacement of staff quarters type-III-02 nos & type-II-14 nos. at Tundia."	6259724.37	125200.00	06 Months	5400.00
13	ELG-14-1920	Part-A:- Replacing and Repairing of Overhead LT lines with provision of street lights in Etawah, Jasantanagar & Ekdil Railway colony. Part-B:- Replacing and Repairing of Overhead LT lines with provision of street lights in Phaphund, Uchalda & Bharthana.	3694604.03	73900.00	06 Months	3200.00
14	ELG-15-1920	Electrical work in connection with Railway siding for cement grinding unit at Harduaganj yard.	3394675.36	67900.00	06 Months	3400.00
15	ELG-16-1920	Electrical works in connection with Etawah: Provision of a new 6.1M wide FOB at Etawah station at Allahabad Division	8705782.78	174100.00	06 Months	5400.00
16	ELG-17-1920	Part(A):- Electrical work in connection with Aligarh: Provision of new foot overbridge wide 6.1M Part(B):- Electrical work	4922290.8	98500.00	06 Months	3400.00
in connection with Chunar- Provision of new FOB wide 6.1M Part(C):- Electrical work in connection with Chheoki Provision of 6.1M wide new FOB at Cheoki stations. Part (D):- Electrical work in connection with "Allahabad Tundia Provision of FOB at Karbigwan, Jasantanagar, Bhadan, Kaurara & Hiran Gaon Stations (05 Nos.)"						
17	ELG-18-1920	Electrical works in connection with Fatehpur Kanpur central Provision of FOB at Kurastikalan, Malwah, Kanspur Gugauli, Aung, Prempur, Kirsaul, Rooma, Chakeri stations (08 Nos.)	4190864.3	83800.00	06 Months	3400.00
18	ELG-19-1920	Electrical works in connection with Allahabad Division: (phase-1) Improvement of illumination in various goods shed of Allahabad Division	3250733.45	65000.00	06 Months	3400.00
19	ELG-20-1920	Electrical works related to PFs lighting at Kanchausi and Maitha Station which will be dismantled due to DFC alignment.	1740595.94	34800.00	06 Months	2400.00

Tender Opening Date: 13.06.2019 Note: 1. The complete information along with tender document are available on Website www.ireps.gov.in up to 15:00 hrs. on the due date of tender opening. 2. Bids other than in the form of E-Bids shall not be accepted against above Tenders. For this purpose, vendors are required to get themselves registered with IREPS website along with digital signature certificates issued by CCA under IT Act-2000. 3. Rates entered into Financial Rate page and duly signed digitally shall only be considered. Rates and any other financial entry in any other form/letter head if attached by vendor shall be straight way ignored and shall not be considered. 4. This tender notice has also been uploaded on www.ncr.indianrailways.gov.in 5. In case of any difficulty helpdesk available on the website of IREPS may be approached. 6. The Contractors should submit valid Class 'A' Electrical License issued by State Government otherwise tender shall not be considered. 7. Rate Quoted by Firm will be inclusive of all Taxes & Duties. 8. Suppliers of goods and/or services would be subject to GST Act and Rules as applicable form time to time. 9. For SN- 2, 10, 11, 12 & 15- The tenderer must have successfully completed "satisfactory execution of any LT/HT Work" during last 07 (seven) years, ending last day of month previous to the one in which tender is invited: Three similar works costing not less than the amount equal to 40% of advertised value of the tender, or Two similar works costing not less than the amount equal to 50% of advertised value of the tender, or One similar work costing not less than the amount equal to 80% of advertised value of the tender. The tenderer must have received contractual payments in the previous three financial years and the current financial year upto the date of opening of tender, at least 150% of the advertised value of the tender. 10. For SN 3, 4 & 5- Electrical license is not required for these works. 678/19(1)

TARGET NON-BELIEVERS

Rattled by exit polls, JeM calls for attacks

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Rattled by the projected outcome of the exit polls in India, Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar has directed his followers to attack non-Muslims and provoke others too to hit non-believers in the country.

The audio message was issued on Monday, a day after the exit polls, and during Ramzan khutba wherein Azhar claimed prayers of jihadis who target the non-Muslims alone will be accepted by God.

The exit polls that projected a clear cut win for the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, comes close on the heels of United Nations' sanctions against the JeM boss under the Al-Qaeda Sanctions List ban-

ning him as a global terrorist.

Earlier, the Modi-led Government had carried out an aerial attack on a major JeM training facility at Balakot in Pakistan and estimated to have killed hundreds of potential suicide bombers. The attack by the Indian Air Force was carried on the 13th day of the Pulwama terror attack on a CRPF convoy by JeM that led to the deaths of 40 CRPF men on February 14 this year.

In the Holy month of Ramzan, Azhar is issuing sermons either himself or through his audio messages are played at various mosques in the areas of JeM influence.

Sources said the idea behind such sermons by Azhar is aimed at uplifting the morale of the cadres who are yet emerge from the setback of the Balakot strikes by India and to

- The exit polls that projected a clear cut win for the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, comes close on the heels of United Nations' sanctions against the JeM boss under the Al-Qaeda Sanctions List banning him as a global terrorist
- Earlier, the Modi-led Government had carried out an aerial attack on a major JeM training facility at Balakot in Pakistan and estimated to have killed hundreds of potential suicide bombers
- Sources said the idea behind such sermons by Azhar is aimed at uplifting the morale of the cadres who are yet emerge from the setback of the Balakot strikes by India and to seek donations from millionaires in the Middle East countries during the month of Ramzan
- Earlier this week, the Pakistani agencies arrested one of the 26/11 terror masterminds Abdul Rehman Makki under pressure from the United States
- The US had asked Pakistan to check free access to Makki across universities in Pakistan as his sermons were specifically directed against US besides India and Israel

seek donations from millionaires in the Middle East countries during the month of Ramzan. They said the UN ban against JeM has also squeezed the finances of the outfit for the time being till it devises ways and means in collusion with the



Pakistan Army-Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) to effectively hoodwink the international community from terror fund-

ing perspective. Post the ban on Jaish chief by the UN and the ongoing actions by the Financial Action

Task Force (FATF) against Pakistan for failing to check terror funding, Islamabad is under considerable pressure to act

against the terror groups used by the neighbouring country as state proxies to target India.

Earlier this week, the Pakistani agencies arrested one of the 26/11 terror masterminds Abdul Rehman Makki under pressure from the United States. Makki was being given free access to the universities in Pakistan to deliver radical speeches intended to radicalise and recruit young and educated students to the terror fold of another UN-banned terror group Lashkar-e-Tayyiba. The US had asked Pakistan to check free access to Makki across universities in Pakistan as his sermons were specifically directed against US besides India and Israel. Ironically, the servers of the social media sites of the Pakistan-based groups are based in the US, sources added.

There will be tit-for-tat: Paswan replies to Kushwaha's 'bloodshed' warning

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With Rashtriya Lok Samta Party (RLSP) chief Upendra Kushwaha warning of "bloodshed" if the ruling BJP and its allies tried to manipulate results, NDA ally and Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) chief Ram Vilas Paswan on Wednesday hit back cautioning a "tit for tat" response in case of any such act. The LJP chief made the statement in front of Home Minister Rajnath Singh during a dinner meeting of NDA allies hosted by BJP president Amit Shah.

"Dekhiye, PM ne kuch nahi kiya hai. Prastav me bhi kuch nahi hai. Lekin humlog...ye (Rajnath) bhi kuch nahi kahenge...Lekin hum kahna chahte hain tit for tat hoga...samajh gaye na...see, PM has not done anything. There is nothing in the resolution. But we...he (Rajnath) will not even say...but I want to say...there will be a tit for tat...understand," Paswan said.

Taking a dig at the opposition parties, Paswan said they are seeking excuses for their imminent defeat and raising doubts over EVMs only to hide their failure. "When they see their defeat is imminent, they raise doubts about EVMs, but when they won in three states, then they didn't say anything on EVMs. Why did they not raise doubts after they won in Punjab?" he said, adding that the LJP will win more seats than predicted by exit polls.

On Tuesday, Kushwaha had threatened his political opponents of bloodshed, if they attempted to tamper with



Union Minister and LJP chief Ram Vilas Paswan addresses the media, in New Delhi on Wednesday

the results of Lok Sabha elections. Addressing a Press conference in Patna, Kushwaha, a former NDA ally and now part of the opposition Mahagathbandhan in Bihar said, "If anyone tried to tamper with the results, then there will be bloodshed."

Kushwaha, said that there was tremendous public anger after alleged exit polls' prediction of NDA winning 30 or more seats in Bihar out of 40. "The exit poll surveys were aimed at causing demoralisation among our cadres, with a mala fide intent," he alleged.

The RLSP chief stressed that attempts were being made

to manipulate Lok Sabha poll results in favour of the ruling NDA, which will have serious consequences.

"Earlier, we used to hear about booth loot. This time, it is suspected that attempts may be made to loot the results. These could be through manipulation of the EVMs or any other measures at the counting centres.

The leaders of the NDA are hereby warned not to indulge in such a misadventure. There is tremendous public anger and blood may spill on the streets, for which we shall not be held responsible," Kushwaha had said.

Govt issues advisory to pvt TV channels

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the counting of votes for the Lok Sabha polls, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on Wednesday issued an advisory to all private satellite TV channels, asking them to strictly comply with their respective undertakings of carrying news or non-news content.

In accordance with the 2011 policy guidelines for uplinking of television channels from India, the ministry gives permission for uplinking under two categories — non-news and current affairs, and news and current affairs.

The 'non-news and current affairs' channel means a channel which does not have any element of news and current affairs in its programme con-

tent. A 'news and current affairs TV channel' means a channel which has elements of news and current affairs in its programme content.

News channels are mandated to carry news and current affairs content, while non-news and current affairs channels are not mandated to carry any news and current affairs content. At the time of applying for a non-news TV channel, the applicant company gives an undertaking that the proposed channel is purely an entertainment channel and does not have any news or current affairs-based programme.

"All TV channels may strictly ensure that there is no violation of the conditions of the guidelines," the I&B Ministry order said.

SC grants protection from arrest till May 28 to BJP candidate from Barrackpore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday granted protection from arrest till May 28 to Arjun Singh, a BJP candidate from Barrackpore constituency in West Bengal, in various criminal cases lodged against him by the State police.

The top court said that no coercive action will be taken against Singh, a four-time MLA, as it took note of widespread violence in the politically sensitive West Bengal during the Lok Sabha polls.

A vacation Bench comprising Justices Arun Mishra and MR Shah made it clear that Singh will not be arrested by the state police till May 28 from today and granted him liberty to approach the appropriate forum for bail after the apex court's protection ceases to exist.

While granting protection to Singh, who has left the ruling Trinamool Congress party to contest Lok Sabha polls on BJP ticket, the Bench took note of ongoing indefinite lawyers' strike in the state since April 25 which has paralysed the judicial work.

"No coercive action be

taken against the petitioner (Arjun Singh) for a period commencing from today till May 28 with regard to all the cases registered against him," the Bench said.

After having dictated the order, Justice Mishra remarked: "People who indulge in arson and rioting do not belong to a party. They join the party in power to commit violence."

Senior advocate Ranjit Kumar, appearing for Singh, alleged political vindictiveness on the part of the State Government and said that 21 cases have been registered against him from April 4 to May 20. He said that in five of the cases he has been granted bail but more cases have been registered against Singh after he joined BJP.

Counsel for the West Bengal government said that cases for rioting and arson were lodged against him.

The Bench told the counsel for State Government that it was inclined to grant protection from arrest to the petitioner (Singh) to enable him to be present for counting of votes tomorrow as he was a candidate for the Lok Sabha polls.

Bhawana 1st woman pilot to qualify as full-fledged fighter

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Flight Lieutenant Bhawana Kanth has become the first woman pilot to qualify as full-fledged fighter pilot. She can now take part in operations along with her male counterparts. She and two other woman pilots namely Avani Chaturvedi and Mohana Singh were mandated in 2016 to undergo training as fighter pilots. All of them underwent the demanding training for nearly two and half years but Kanth became the first to be selected to become operational.

All the three pilots were the first batch of woman officers to be selected for flying fighter jets. Prior to that, woman pilots only flew transport planes and helicopters. Kanth flew solo a MIG-21



Flt Lt Bhawana Kanth enters her aircraft as she completes day operational syllabus on MIG-21 Bison aircraft. She is the first woman fighter pilot to be qualified to undertake missions by day on a fighter aircraft

Bison for the first time from Ambala air base last year, thereby, becoming the second woman pilot besides Chaturvedi to do so. Solo flying a fighter jet is rated as a

AFT directs Govt to submit all records related to selection of chief by May 29

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a major development in the issue of Vice Admiral Bimal Verma challenging the appointment of his junior Vice Admiral Karambir Singh as the next Navy chief, the Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT) on Wednesday directed the Government to submit all the records related to the selection of the next chief by May 29. Singh would take charge on May 31 after incumbent Navy Chief Admiral Sunil Lanba retires the same day.

While directing the government to submit the related documents as sought by Verma, the AFT also said if found merit, then new appointment of Singh can be put on hold. The AFT has issued

notice to the ministry of defence to furnish all the documents based on which the selection of next navy chief is done, Verma's lawyer Ankur Chibber said.

The Defence Ministry last week rejected Verma's petition in which he had challenged Singh's appointment as the next Navy Chief. Verma, at present, is the commander-in-chief of the Andaman and Nicobar Command and also the senior-most naval commander while Singh is heading the Eastern naval command. He was selected as the next chief on March 23.

Last month, Verma had moved the tribunal questioning the government's decision by overlooking his seniority. The tribunal on April 25 directed the defence ministry to decide

on Verma's petition to the government within three weeks.

While rejecting Verma's plea, the ministry said during selection process, it was found that Verma, though being the senior most eligible officer, was unsuitable to hold the post of the Chief of the Naval Staff. Ministry also said a thorough selection process was conducted under which overall service profile of all the contenders for the top post was examined.

The Government listed reasons for overlooking Verma for the top job. They included a severe letter of displeasure during Navy War Room Leak case when he was posted in Naval Ops Directorate and the fact that he never commanded any operational command.

Govt deliberately misled court in Rafale case, say petitioners

New Delhi: Former Union Ministers Yashwant Sinha, Arun Shourie and activist advocate Prashant Bhushan alleged in the Supreme Court on Wednesday that the Centre "wilfully and deliberately" misled the court in the Rafale fighter jet case and this amounted to "wholesale fraud".

They claimed that the Centre suppressed relevant facts from the court during the hearing in the case.

The trio is seeking review of the apex court's December 14 verdict which gave a clean chit to the Rafale deal to procure fighter jets from Dassault.

In their written submission, brought by them into public domain a day before the counting of votes for the Lok Sabha polls, they said that officers who have misled the apex court should be held accountable for perjury as the government, through the notes

and arguments, had "stated a series of untruths".

"It (Centre) suppressed the truth and thereby insinuated utter falsehoods: facts and documents of the greatest significance, which have direct and overarching bearing on the matter that the court was considering, and which were available with the Government were suppressed from the court," they said in the 41-page submission.

Govt shortlists 5 cities for yoga day

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shimla, Ahmedabad, Mysuru, Ranchi and Delhi—these five cities have been shortlisted by the Government for holding the main function of International Yoga Day this year on June 21st.

According to a senior Union AYUSH Ministry official, the shortlisted five cities have good potential to hold the yoga event on mass scale. "These names will now be sent to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) which will select one city and then finalise the venue of the main function of IDY to be held on June 21," he said. This time the theme of the yoga day will be the 'Festival of Well-Being' while an year-long yoga programmes will be held across the country. Also, it



will be ensured that the programme is eco-friendly ie focus will be on promoting eco-friendly yoga related access-

sories. In the lead-up to the main event, an international yoga festival would be held on June 1-

2 at the Indira Gandhi Stadium in the national Capital. "The aim is to build an atmosphere of Yoga in the lead-up to the

main event and sensitise the masses about the grand function on June 21," the official said. "Like every-year, Yoga will be promoted in a big way," he said.

The United Nations General Assembly, heading to a call by Prime Minister Modi, had made a declaration in December 2014 to observe June 21 every year as IDY. Last year, the main event of the IDY was held in Dehradun in Uttar Pradesh in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated.

The first IDY celebration was organised at Rajpath in New Delhi on June 21, 2015, in which representatives of 191 countries took part. In 2016, the main function was held in Chandigarh while in 2017 it was in Lucknow.

No transit accommodation in hotels for newly-elected MPs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Newly elected members of 17th Lok Sabha will not get accommodation in five star hotels this year. Instead, they will be put up in the Western Court premises, bhavans of various states and its annexe building.

With the counting of votes for the Lok Sabha polls scheduled for Thursday, the newly-elected members are expected to start arriving in the national capital from Friday. MPs were often lodged in hotels earlier, which at times invited criticism for the money it cost the exchequer.

Lok Sabha Secretary General Snehlata Shrivastava on Wednesday said the newly-elected members of the Lower House of Parliament will no longer be lodged in hotels but in state bhavans, Western Court, a transit hostel for parliamentarians, and its annexe building. "As many as 300 rooms have been arranged along with other extensive facilities to render all possible assistance to the MPs.

Thus, the Lok Sabha secretary has done away with the system of transit accommoda-

tion in hotels," Shrivastava told reporters. Medical posts will also function on round the clock basis in Parliament House and Western Court, she added.

The Secretariat has also set up guide posts at the Indira Gandhi International Airport's (IGIA) terminals one, two and three to receive the newly-elected members, she said, adding similar posts have also set up at New Delhi, Old Delhi, Hazrat Nizamuddin and Anand Vihar railway stations.

The guide posts will function on May 23 from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. and thereafter on May 24 from 5 am to 11 pm.

These guide posts are basically reception centres where members will be received on their arrival in Delhi, she said. As in the past, Shrivastava said, Room No 62 of the Parliament House will function as the facilitation centre for these MPs, and it will be functional from May 23 to May 28.

According to Shrivastava, returning officers in all parliamentary constituencies had already been informed about the arrangements being made by the Lok Sabha Secretariat for the newly-elected members in respect of transit accommoda-

tion, telephone facilities, and their other preliminary requirements. The new members, she said, have been requested to bring with them the certificate of election, in original, issued to them by the returning officer concerned when they visit the Parliament House.

For the first time, the advance copy of the documentation, containing various forms, has been forwarded to the returning officers for the use of the members, she said.

The members can register online with regard to forms in part one such as oath or affirmation, specimen signature, transit accommodation and declarations under different rules.

As part of the outreach plan, 56 nodal officers have been assigned around eight to 10 constituencies each to get in touch with the newly-elected members, and to guide them about the various formalities.

The Secretary General said that the members, for the first time, will be immediately issued permanent identity cards on their arrival in Parliament House. Earlier, the members and their spouses were issued temporary passes.

Kerala may see Lotus bloom

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

The 2019 General Election is likely to open a new battle front in Kerala's bi-polar politics, hitherto monopolised by the CPI(M) and the Congress-led Left Democratic Front and the United Democratic Front respectively. If the mood of the electorate is any indication, Kerala may see the BJP winning one or two seats in the State for the first time in the history of the Lok Sabha election.

"I am sure the BJP will win at least one seat in the State and that is going to be precursor of many political possibilities in Kerala. The State would not be the same afterwards," said P Rajan, seasoned political commentator and former editor of Mathrubhumi. The septuagenarian author is a close associate of Congress leaders like Panampalli Govinda Menon and KC Abraham, the regional satraps of Kerala.

What has happened in the State is the consolidation of Hindu votes, at least in some constituencies where the Hindus are in a majority. The

intransigent attitude of the CPI(M)-led LDF government in admitting women of all ages to Sabarimala, the Holy Shrine atop the Western Ghats where Lord Ayyappa is the presiding deity, led to the consolidation of Hindu votes. The devotees stood united against the Government move to facilitate the entry of women in the age group of 10-50 and they were beaten up and incarcerated slapping charges under the non-bailable sections of the IPC.

The appeasement policy of the CPI(M) and the Congress towards the minorities too came handy for the BJP which had some pockets of strength in the State. The first time the BJP could enter the Kerala Legislative Assembly was in 2016 when O Rajagopal, the party veteran won from a suburb in Thiruvananthapuram.

"The adamant stance of chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan that women devotees should be allowed to worship at Sabarimala under police protection has caused heartburning among ardent believers in traditions and customs. K

Surendran, the BJP candidate at Pathanamthitta was in the forefront of the agitation against the entry of women in Sabarimala. The Supreme Court agreed to hear the review petitions filed by the devotees against the Constitution Bench verdict is proof of the seriousness of the situation," said K Ramkumar, senior lawyer, Kerala High Court.

There has been an increase of eight percent polling at Pathanamthitta this year as 74 per cent of the voters cast their polls this time compared to 66 per cent in 2014. Besides Pathanamthitta, the BJP leadership is hopeful of bagging two more seats from the State and this include

Thiruvananthapuram and Thrissur. But in a politically and communally divided State like Kerala, everything would become clear only after the EVMs are opened. The feeling is that the Lotus would bloom this time in the State. "If we fail to win at least one seat this time, it is the end of the road for the BJP in Kerala," said Sudhakaran, a party activist at Perumbavoor.

Poll results: WB on high alert

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Bengal police administration went on a high alert in anticipation of "untoward incidents," following reports that there could be an escalation in political violence post declaration of election results on Thursday.

While the Election Commission took extra precaution by requisitioning 200 companies of central forces in addition to the 82 companies deployed at 58 counting centres for 42 Lok Sabha seats spread across 22 districts, including Kolkata.

Much to the chagrin of the ruling Trinamool Congress, the stay of the central forces had been extended by 4 days till May 27 following concerns, expressed by Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman about the ongoing violence in the State.

One example of an increased police pro-activeness was a heated exchange between North Bengal Development Minister RN Ghosh and the Coochbehar SP who directed both the TMC and the BJP to remove their respective party camps beyond 100 metre radius of the counting centre, sources said adding the Minister was heard reminding the SP that the

EC would be at the helm of affairs till May 27 — following which the State Government would get back the command — getting a prompt reply that he was prepared for all the eventualities.

Even as the police went on a maximum alert apprehending escalation in political street fights violence continued in areas like Bhatpara in Barrackpore Lok Sabha constituency where a person died while the crude bomb he was making exploded leaving three others grievously injured.

Following continuing violence in the area the ECI took extra precaution by deploying additional central forces outside the house of BJP candidate Arjun Singh who had just before the elections quit Trinamool Congress to join the saffron outfit. A bunker was erected for the CAPF jawans outside his house.

Earlier senior BJP leader Kailash Vijabargiya apprehending threat to Singh's life saying Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee could even get him killed in an encounter. Singh a former TMC MLA on Tuesday secured a Supreme Court order preventing the State from arresting him for five days within which he could approach a lower court for anticipatory bail.

HDK will be CM till Friday morning: Sadananda Gowda

Bengaluru: Union Minister D V Sadananda Gowda claimed on Wednesday that the Congress-JD(S) coalition Government in Karnataka would collapse after the Lok Sabha poll results and HD Kumaraswamy would be the Chief Minister only till May 24 morning.

Gowda, a former Karnataka Chief Minister, also said the stage would be ready for the formation of a new Government in the state after that.

"Kumaraswamy will be the Chief Minister of Karnataka till tomorrow evening only. Tomorrow evening or by day-after-tomorrow morning, because if he does not get to sleep in the night...So day-after-tomorrow morning, hundred per cent Kumaraswamy will step down," he said.

Speaking to reporters here, the BJP leader said, "The stage will be set for the formation of a new Government."

Speculation is rife that an adverse outcome in the Lok Sabha polls would impact the stability of the coalition Government in Karnataka.

Exit polls have forecast that the Congress-JD(S) alliance is likely to perform badly in the parliamentary polls. **PTI**

Tamil Nadu: All eyes on poll results

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI



Entire Tamil Nadu is waiting with bated breath as the counting officials are all set to open the Electronic Voting Machines at 08.00 am on Thursday to count the votes cast in election to the 38 Lok Sabha seats as well as the 22 Assembly constituencies.

This is the first time in the recent history that a general election has generated this kind of anxiety and expectation in the State. What has made this election crucial in Tamil Nadu is the by-elections which were held in 22 Assembly constituencies in the State. The bypolls were necessitated because 18 MLAs, belonging to the AIADMK, were disqualified by Speaker P Dhanapal under the provisions of the anti-defection law when they wrote to the Governor declaring their Opposition to Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswamy. Three legislators including former Chief Minister M Karunanidhi died while Balakrishna Reddy, a Minister

in the State council of Ministers was sentenced by a court for his alleged role in riots which automatically disqualified him from being a member of the House.

Tamil Nadu Assembly has a total strength of 234 members. The ruling party should have a minimum of 118 seats to claim absolute majority. The AIADMK had won 136 seats in the 2016 Assembly election while the Opposition DMK and its allies have 98 members. TTV Dhinakaran, the lone member of the AMMK, a breakaway faction of the AIADMK, would extend support to the DMK to pull down the Palaniswamy Government. If the DMK manages to win 20 seats out of the 22 seats where polling was held, it would be certain for the AIADMK regime under the leadership of Palaniswamy.

BJP questioned EVMs first: Siddaramiah

Bengaluru: As the debate over EVMs heated up, former Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramiah on Wednesday said it was BJP spokesperson G VL Narasimha Rao who has authored a book questioning about electronic voting machines 10 years ago and party veteran LK Advani had written the preface of it.

In a tweet in Kannada, Siddaramiah wrote, "BJP was the first to raise doubts about the EVMs. The spokesperson of that party had even written a book. Supporting the doubt, L K Advani had written the preface of the book. What's the reason behind BJP's change in stand in the last 10 years?" The book 'Democracy at risk due to EVMs' was written by Rao, a psephologist-turned politician, after 2009 elections. A poster Siddaramiah tweeted says, "Concerns about EVMs are legitimate when raised by BJP!" **PTI**

J&K Guv says his admin wants President's Rule to end in State as soon as possible

Srinagar: Jammu & Kashmir Governor Satya Pal Malik on Wednesday said his administration wants the President's Rule to end in the state at the earliest but the final call on the timing of assembly elections will be taken by the Election Commission.

Asked if some officials within his administration were not keen on transfer of power to an elected Government in the State, the Governor said there was nothing like that in his notice.

"We want this (President's Rule) to end as soon as possible. The final call on holding assembly elections in the state will be taken by the Election Commission," Malik told reporters after inaugurating the second phase of the Jehangir Chowk-Rambagh flyover.

Recently, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh also said a decision on holding



Assembly elections in the State was the prerogative of the Election Commission but indicated a decision could be announced after the completion of the Lok Sabha polls.

Jammu & Kashmir was placed under Governor's Rule on June 19, 2018 after the PDP-BJP coalition Government fell as the BJP decided to pull out of the alliance.

The State Assembly was kept in suspended animation to allow for the possibility of any new combination of parties to form a Government in the State.

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti supported by the National Conference and the Congress staked claim for government formation on 21 November, 2018.

Within minutes, People's Conference chairman Sajad Lone, who had just two MLAs, also staked claim for government formation.

The governor decided to dissolve the assembly on the grounds that he wanted to prevent horse-trading.

The state was brought under President's Rule on December 19, 2018 for a period of six months as elections could not be held within six months of imposition of Governor's Rule in the State. The President's Rule will have to be extended again on June 19, 2019 as assembly elections have not been held so far. The order for extending President's rule will have to be ratified by Parliament. **PTI**



An election officer monitors a CCTV camera feed of a vote counting center in Ahmedabad on Wednesday

PTI

Guj: Results may be delayed by 3-4 hrs due to VVPAT counting

Ahmedabad: Election authorities said on Wednesday that declaration of results of 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat may get delayed by around 3 to 4 hours due to counting of voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) slips.

VVPAT slips of five randomly selected Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) will be counted in every Assembly segment after EVM votes are counted, said the state's Chief Electoral Officer S Murali Krishna.

Each of the 26 Lok Sabha seats has six to seven assembly segments.

If the slips and EVM data do not match, count of VVPAT slips will be taken into consideration, said Krishna.

"Due to this exercise, declaration of final results may get delayed by around 3 to 4

hours...Trends will be out by afternoon. Only formal declaration would get delayed. Final results may come late in the evening," Krishna told PTI.

Counting of votes for 26 Lok Sabha seats and four Assembly seats (where by-polls were held) in the state will start across 28 centers from 8 am, involving over 8,000 counting staff.

Polling was held in a single phase on April 23, recording a turnout of 64.11 per cent, the highest in the state since 1976 when there was around 63.77 voting.

Chief Minister Vijay Rupani expressed confidence that the BJP will retain all the 26 seats in the state.

"There is a Modi 'wave', people of the state are enthusiastic to make Modi prime minister again. The results are cer-

tain," Rupani told reporters in Gandhinagar.

Gujarat Congress chief Amit Chavda claimed his party will win at least 10 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

"The results of Gujarat will surprise all," he said.

In the 2017 state Assembly polls to 182 seats, the Congress won 77 seats while the BJP bagged 99 and retained power with a slender majority.

The main contenders from the BJP in Lok Sabha polls this time are party chief Amit Shah (from Gandhinagar seat) and Union minister Jaswantsinh Bhabhor (Dahod).

The Congress has fielded former Union minister Bharatsinh Solanki from Anand and its leader of opposition in the Assembly Paresih Dhanani from Amreli Lok Sabha seats. **PTI**

Opp sore losers, desperation over VVPAT issue indication of their defeat: Ram Vilas Paswan

New Delhi: Union Minister and BJP ally Ram Vilas Paswan on Wednesday dubbed the Opposition "sore losers" and claimed that their "desperation" over the VVPAT issue was an indication of their defeat in the Lok Sabha polls.

Leaders of 22 opposition parties met the Election Commission on Tuesday ahead of the Lok Sabha election results and demanded verification of VVPAT slips of randomly-selected polling stations before the counting of votes begins Thursday. The EC on Wednesday rejected the demand.

"I have been saying for many months now that when the opposition heads towards defeat it starts complaining about EVM. Those opposing

EVMs want to drag India back to the time when money and muscle power decided elections. The Supreme Court has heard the issue four times already. They are now concocting stories in the face of impending defeat. They are just sore losers," he said.

"When you win, EVMs are alright. But when you lose, allegations about EVM manipulation arise. This kind of pessimistic attitude of the Opposition will hurt the Constitution and also the Indian democracy," Paswan said.

To a question on the future of his son in an NDA Government, the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) chief said that Chirag Paswan had all the capabilities to be a Union Minister. **PTI**

DMK hits out at poll body for sticking to VVPAT last norm

Chennai: The DMK on Wednesday wondered if the Election Commission's move to stick to counting VVPAT slips at the end of the counting process was a democratic act, ignoring demands by 22 Opposition parties against it.

The main opposition party in Tamil Nadu hit out at the poll body, saying its decision has blurred the distinction between an independent institution and the Central government.

"Is this democracy...? Will the Election Commission listen only to Prime Minister Narendra Modi...? senior DMK leader Duraimurugan asked.

He pointed out that the EC's reported move to count

VVPAT slips at the end comes despite as many as 22 Opposition parties urging the slip count in the beginning.

"The distinction between the Election Commission and the Central government has gone," he told PTI when contacted for his party's stand on the EC's decision.

The top party leader alleged that the incumbent election commissioners have forgotten that the EC is an independent body. The Opposition parties had approached the EC on Tuesday demanding VVPATs be counted first — prior to counting EVM votes — and in case of problems or mismatch, all VVPAT slips be counted. **PTI**

5 RSS workers get life for murder of CPM activist, 11 acquitted

Thalassery (Ker): Five RSS workers were sentenced to life imprisonment by a local court Wednesday in a case related to the murder of a CPI(M) activist here in 2006.

Additional Sessions Judge R L Byju convicted Shankaran Master (48), his brother Manoharan (42), Vijesh (38), Prakashan (48) and Kavayesh (40) of murder, rioting and other offences under the Indian Penal Code. Awarding rigorous life imprisonment to the five accused, the judge also imposed a fine of ₹50,000 each on them.

The court acquitted 11 other accused, including RSS worker Valsan Thillenger. According to the prosecution, a group of men fatally attacked CPI(M) activist K K Yakub with bombs on June 13, 2006, due to political rivalry. **PTI**

Mah: Ex-NCP Min quits party, joins Sena

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Ahead of Lok Sabha poll outcome, the NCP suffered a setback on Wednesday, as its former Minister and senior leader from Beed district in Marathwada region, Jaydutta Kshirsagar, joined the ruling Shiv Sena, after saying that he was feeling "suffocated" in the Sharad Pawar-led party.

After days of intense speculation about his possible entry to the Shiv Sena, Kshirsagar formally resigned from the primary membership of the NCP and also quit as an MLA from Beed, before joining the Sena in the presence of its president Uddhav Thackeray, at the latter's

Bandra residence "Matoshri" in north-west Mumbai.

Welcoming Kshirsagar into his party fold, Uddhav tied a red thread on the former's hand symbolising 'Shiv Bandhan' and handing him a miniature party flag.

Uddhav said that with the entry of an experienced leader like Kshirsagar to his party, the Sena's organisational base would be strengthened further in Marathwada in general and Beed in particular.

Kshirsagar's exit from the NCP should be seen in the context of the fact that he had been associated with the Sharad Pawar-led party, ever since it was founded 20 years ago on May 25, 1999. It was Pawar who had gone to the

Beed residence of Kshirsagar to personally invite the latter from the Congress to his party.

Talking to media persons after joining the Shiv Sena, Kshirsagar said: "My decision to join the Shiv Sena has nothing to do with the exit poll projections. I had taken the decision to join the Shiv Sena a long ago. I had also announced my open support to the Sena-BJP alliance candidates in the Lok Sabha polls. Having been associated with the NCP since the formation of the party, I contributed to its growth in my district"

"Beed district has given six MLAs to the NCP. Still, my supporters and I were feeling suffocated in the NCP. That's why I have chosen to quit the

NCP," Kshirsagar said.

Kshirsagar was an influential minister in the previous Congress-NCP government. He was the PWD minister and chairman of the State-run the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) in the Ashok Chavan cabinet. In fact, he had courted a controversy by inviting Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachhan for the inauguration of the second carriage-way of Bandra-Worli Sea Link (BWSL) —known officially as the Rajiv Gandhi Sea Link on March 24, 2010.

Kshirsagar's decision to invite Big-B without consulting the chief minister had not gone well with the Congress, which was the principal ruling

party in the coalition government.

Kshirsagar's influence within the NCP eroded markedly, after the entry of late BJP leader's estranged nephew Dhananjay Munde, also from Beed district, joined the NCP.

Dhananjay, who formally joined the NCP after resigning as the BJP MLC on July 2, 2013, was re-elected to the Maharashtra Legislative Council on September 2, 2013. It may be recalled that Ajit Pawar had encouraged Dhananjay, a BJP MLC then, to rebel against his uncle Gopinath Munde in the run up to the December 2011 presidential poll in the Parli Municipal Council.

Kerala CM writes to EC, CRPF over lack of facilities for police on poll duty

Thiruvananthapuram: Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Wednesday demanded that the Election Commission and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) ensure that necessary facilities were provided to Kerala police officials being deputed to other states for poll duties.

Vijayan shot off letters to the Commission and CRPF following reports that police personnel from the state had faced hardships during their return journey after participating in Lok Sabha polls in Bihar.

"The Commission and CRPF should give necessary

directions to ensure that police personnel deputed for poll duties are provided all necessary facilities, including for their return journey," Vijayan said.

Those deploying police personnel for official duties have the responsibility of ensuring the pride of the service personnel is upheld.

It is unfortunate that some times it was not being implemented, he said.

The police personnel, who were deputed for election duty, did not have railway berths or seats reserved for them and were forced to travel in a crowded general compart-

ment. This ordeal was just after they had completed their official work without any rest. After being stationed in Lakshadweep, many of the police personnel were sent to Bihar for poll-related work, the release said.

During the deputation of such personnel, either a special bogey should be attached or some sleeper berths set apart, which unfortunately did not happen.

Vijayan urged the Election Commission and CRPF to conduct a probe into such incidents and take steps to ensure they do not recur. **PTI**

Lalu's absence was big challenge while fighting polls: Tej Pratap

Patna: The absence of RJD chief Lalu Prasad during campaigning in Bihar for the seven-phase Lok Sabha polls was a "very big challenge", but the party has put up a "good fight" nonetheless, his son Tej Pratap Yadav said.

Known for his signature one-liners and trenchant wit, this was for the first time, Prasad was not present in the elections as he is serving sentences in connection with fodder scam cases.

The former Bihar chief minister is currently admitted at a hospital in Jharkhand capital Ranchi on account of his poor health.

The "lantern (RJD poll symbol) will be lit" at many places in the state on May 23, Tej Pratap said, though he felt

that the result would be "surprising".

"My father has always been the voice of the poor and the downtrodden and that is the legacy he handed over to me and my brother (Tejashwi Yadav), to fight for them and to bring equality and justice in society," the RJD leader and former Bihar health minister said, ahead of counting of votes on Thursday.

"His (Lalu's) physical absence in this election was indeed a very big challenge for us," Tej Pratap told PTI in an interview.

Asked, what is the number of seats the mahagathbandhan (grand alliance) in Bihar is eyeing in the just-concluded polls, Prasad's elder son said that "the numbers could swing as voters'

mood is also not quite clear at the moment".

"We (the RJD) have done our work and reached out to the people and made them aware of the economic and political situation in Bihar and in the country. If fortune is in our favour, we should get 20-25 seats as per our preparations," Tej Pratap said.

The Mahua MLA, however, said he himself was on the "horns of a dilemma" as far as the number of seats the party could win was concerned, adding that it will have a "element of surprise" this time.

Tej Pratap also said he was hopeful that his sister Misa Bharti would be able to pull off a win from the Pataliputra constituency and claimed that

the people are "unhappy" with sitting BJP MP Ram Kripal Yadav.

Elections were held in Bihar in all seven phases, from Gaya on April 11 to Patna Sahib on May 19 spanning 40 Lok Sabha seats.

As per seat sharing in the 'mahagathbandhan' in the state, the RJD fought on 19 seats, Congress on nine, RLSP on five, VIP and HAM three each. One seat was left by RJD for the CPI (ML).

RJD banks hugely on Prasad's legacy as his riveting speeches during poll campaigns are known to energise voters and attract mediapersons in big number.

"Laluji would talk to people of all strata and sit and eat with people of all caste. He took

all communities along. In fact, he would make us brothers sit and teach the way to reach out to the masses.

"He would ask us to fold hands in front of people as 'janta is our malik', tell us to wear kurta-pyjama, mostly khadi, and talk in local parlance as much as possible to better connect with the masses," Tej Pratap said.

The RJD leader said he and Tejashwi have to merely keep the field "irrigated" that was "tilled by my father".

Notwithstanding exit polls forecasts, Tej Pratap hit out at the BJP, saying it is a "party of businessmen (vyapariyon ki party)" who have "done nothing" for farmers or youths in the five years of its Government.



Indian Army troops conducts a search operation in the jungles of Tirap on Wednesday

PTI

Combing op launched to trace militants involved in killing of MLA and 10 others

Itanagar: A massive combing operation has been launched by security forces to trace the suspected NSCN militants who gunned down MLA Tirong Aboh and 10 others near Khonsa in Arunachal Pradesh on Tuesday, an official said on Wednesday.

The Army, the Assam Rifles and the state police have launched the operation to nab the perpetrators involved in the crime, Tirap Deputy Commissioner P N Thungon said.

The Army deployed helicopters on Tuesday night to search the area, which is covered by dense jungle.

The suspected NSCN rebels gunned down Aboh, his son and nine others in the 12 Mile area, 20 km from Khonsa, the district headquarters town of Tirap, on Tuesday, when the lawmaker was on his way to

Khonsa from Dibrugarh in Assam.

Aboh (41) had won the Khonsa West Assembly seat in 2014 and was seeking re-election as a National People's Party (NPP) candidate from the constituency.

"So far, no arrests have been made, but the operation has been intensified by the security agencies by cordoning the area," the DC said.

The bodies of the victims have been handed over to their relatives after conducting post-mortem.

Defence sources at Dinjan in Dibrugarh confirmed the involvement of NSCN(IM) in the killings, stating that a group of about 10 to 15 rebels were involved in the shootout.

The militants had also set ablaze one of the vehicles in Aboh's convoy, the sources said.

While a police personnel

and a civilian had sustained bullet injuries in the attack, a woman and another police personnel had escaped unhurt.

The civilian and Aboh's PSO were shifted to a Dibrugarh hospital, Director General of Police (DGP) S B K Singh had said.

The DIG (East), the IGP (Law & Order) and the SP from neighbouring Changlang district moved to Khonsa on Tuesday to supervise the operations and coordinate with various security agencies.

This is the second such incident in Tirap district in recent times, after two supporters of Aboh were killed by NSCN(IM) militants in March. Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, his deputy Kiren Rijiju and Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu have condemned the attack.

18, including 13 women, held from bar in Maha

Palghar: Eighteen people, including 13 women dancers, were arrested from a bar in Palghar district of Maharashtra for allegedly indulging in obscenity, police said on Wednesday.

Acting on a complaint, sleuths of the local crime branch raided the bar located in Vasai area on Tuesday and arrested its manager, two waiters and as many customers, a police spokesman said.

Besides, 13 women were also nabbed for allegedly performing obscene acts, he said.

Those arrested were booked under various Indian Penal Code sections, including 294 (indulging in obscene acts and songs), and provisions of the Maharashtra Police Act, he added.

HC reserves order on CBI plea to extend probe time in Asthana bribery case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI Wednesday told the Delhi High Court that it was asking for more time to complete the investigation in a bribery case involving the agency's former special director Rakesh Asthana so as to conduct the probe in a free, fair and transparent manner.

Justice Mukta Gupta, after hearing the submissions of the counsel for CBI, Asthana and two others, reserved the order on the application by the CBI seeking extension of time to complete the probe in the case lodged against Asthana, DSP Devender Kumar and middleman Manoj Prasad.

Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Vikramjit Banerjee, representing the CBI, said they were giving effect to the court's January order by which the agency was asked to complete the investigation in the case within 10 weeks.

"We are doing the investiga-

tion in a free, fair and transparent manner. We are only asking for extension of time to complete the investigation. We are not seeking review of the court's January 11 verdict, that's the crux of my case," he said.

The court was informed that Kumar has filed an appeal before the Supreme Court against the high court's order dismissing his and others' plea to quash the FIR against them.

Senior advocate Amrendra Sharan, appearing for Asthana, said when an order has been passed by the high court in a criminal case and the petition has been disposed of, the court cannot entertain the review plea or any other miscellaneous application.

The ASG also said the CBI was entitled to implement the order of the high court and to conduct a fair investigation and he was asking for a short time of

four months to complete the probe. The court had earlier questioned the CBI for not sending Letters Rogatory (LRs) to various countries till mid of April even though it had passed in January the order dismissing the pleas to quash the FIR.

LRs are a formal request from a court to a foreign court for some judicial assistance.

On January 11, the court had granted 10 weeks to the probe agency to complete its investigation. The high court in January had disposed of three petitions of Asthana, Kumar and Prasad by a common order in which CBI was directed to complete investigation in the case within ten weeks.

Earlier, Kumar's lawyers had told the court that the application was not maintainable according to section 362 of the Criminal Procedure Code which states that a court may not alter or review

its final order in a matter except to correct a clerical or arithmetical error.

The court had not agreed with the contention, saying the instant matters were writ petitions and not a criminal complaint and therefore, section 362 may not be applicable.

Asthana was booked on the allegations of criminal conspiracy, corruption and criminal misconduct under the relevant sections of Prevention of Corruption Act.

Kumar, earlier the investigating officer in a case involving meat exporter Moin Qureshi, was arrested on the allegations of forgery in recording the statement of Hyderabad-based businessman Sathish Babu Sana, who had alleged having paid bribe to get relief in the case. He was arrested on October 22, 2018 and granted bail on October 31.

2 terrorists killed in encounter in J&K's Kulgam

Rajouri: 4 AK rifles, 9 pistols and 2 modified guns recovered

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A joint team of security forces on Wednesday eliminated two more terrorists in South Kashmir district of Kulgam.

In another incident, one army jawan, injured during a training activity at one of the forward posts in Mendhar, succumbed to his fatal injuries while two others were rushed to a nearby military hospital for advanced treatment. In addition, security forces in Rajouri also recovered huge quantity of arms and ammunition including 4 AK Rifles, 9 pistols, 2 modified guns and 900 rounds of AK rifle. Defence Spokesman in Jammu, Lt-Col Devender Anand said, "around 9.15 a.m when soldiers were carrying out a training drill with live ammunition at a forward post in Mendhar sector, a live grenade

got actuated accidentally and it went off causing grievous injuries to instructor and others. Out of these injured soldiers, 34 year old Naik Shreshailappa Balabatti, hailing from Karnataka, succumbed to his injuries. He is survived by his wife. Defence spokesman said, "the army authorities are carrying out detailed investigation of the incident to take corrective measures".

Meanwhile, sharing details of kulgam encounter police spokesman said, "a cordon and search operation was launched by police and security forces at Gopalpora of DH Pora area in district Kulgam on the basis of credible intelligence input".

"During the search operation, the hiding terrorists fired on the search party. The fire was retaliated leading to an encounter. In the ensuing encounter, two terrorists were killed and the bodies were retrieved from the site of encounter", police spokesman said.

Pragya, Azam Khan, Moonmoon made headlines with their views

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Call them motor-mouths or simply contentious, they are the not-to-be-quietened candidates who kept up the controversial chatter through the Lok Sabha elections, sometimes at rallies and other times through social media posts or responses to questions from the media.

From east to west and north to south, a battery of candidates across the political spectrum demonstrated a penchant for getting into trouble with their views on a range of issues.

Some like Samajwadi Party's Azam Khan and Bharatiya Janata Party's Giriraj Singh are old time 'foot-in-the-mouth' politicians, frequently in the headlines for their outspoken and sometimes outrageous views, others like BJP's Pragya Singh Thakur and Communist Party of India's Kanhaiya Kumar are new to the election game.

They stoked controversy during the high-voltage campaign, at times forcing the Election Commission to bar some of them from campaigning or inviting scrutiny from their own party's leadership.

Thakur, an accused in the 2008 Malegaon blasts case who is contesting elections from Bhopal, last week lauded Mahatma Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse as a "patriot", sparking furious debate in the last lap of the seven-phase elections.

The Congress alleged that "insulting martyrs is in the DNA



of the BJP, which also condemned her remarks. Thakur later apologised for her remarks.

She also had to apologise for her remarks on 26/11 attack martyr, IPS officer Hemant Karkare, that she had "cursed" him for torturing her and falsely implicating her in the blasts case. Thakur was temporarily banned from campaigning for her hate remarks by the Election Commission. Her electoral rival, Congress' Digvijay Singh, is not new to controversies either.

In March this year, just as the country was gearing up for elections, he said the Pulwama terror attack was an "accident".

In Uttar Pradesh, SP's Khan attracted widespread ire for his sexist jibes against his one-time colleague, actor-politician Jaya Prada, who is his rival in the Rampur seat and joined the BJP

in remarks seen as attacking the Muslim community.

In March, the veteran BJP leader was reported as saying those not attending the rally of the prime minister, to be held that month, would be deemed anti-national. He, however, himself remained absent from that very rally. His rival Kanhaiya Kumar, a former student leader from Jawaharalal Nehru University who was charged with sedition for allegedly making anti-India comments, said on Twitter, "For BJP people Godse is a patriot. They are expected to call people like us as traitor. Thank God BJP doesn't consider us patriots."

In the South, Nalin Kumar Kateel, the BJP's candidate and sitting MP from Dakshina Kannada in Karnataka, dove into the Godse controversy by comparing the assassin with with Rajiv Gandhi.

"Godse killed one, Kasab killed 72, Rajiv Gandhi killed 17,000. You judge who is more cruel in this?" Kateel tweeted, equating Godse, 26/11 convict Ajmal Kasab and Rajiv Gandhi. He later retracted his remarks.

The BJP reprimanded him as well as Union minister Anantkumar Hegde, its candidate in Uttara Kannada in the state, who also tweeted on Godse but later deleted it. BJP's young leader Tejasvi Surya, contesting from Karnataka's Bangalore South constituency, also made several controversial statements over the last one year, retracting some and deleting some.

Bihar sees high female turnout in LS polls

PTI ■ PATNA

Nearly 60 per cent female voters came out to exercise their franchise in Bihar in the Lok Sabha elections as against just about 55 per cent turnout for men. As per the figures released by the Election Commission here, the overall turnout for female voters stood at 59.92 per cent as against 55.26 per cent for men.

The constituencies which registered the highest female turnouts were Katihar (72.37), Supaul (71.64), Kishanganj (70.37), Araria (69.39), Purnea (68.15), Begusarai (67.13), Samastipur (66.74), Vaishali (66.62) and Ujiarpur (65.12).

In contrast, the male turnout did not exceed 65 per cent in any of the 40 seats in the state and exceeded 60 per cent in only five: Supaul, Araria, Kishanganj, Katihar and Purnea, it said.

Notably, among the constituencies with the highest female turnouts, only Supaul and Vaishali had a woman candidate as one of the main contestants. While sitting Congress MP Ranjeet Ranjan is in the fray from Supaul, in Vaishali the LJP has fielded Veena Devi.

In some constituencies, the difference between male and female turnout was significantly high. In Sitamarhi 54.53 per cent men voted as against 64.36 per cent women. In Madhubani and Jhanjharpur, the male turnout stood at 48.14

per cent and 51.25 per cent respectively as against 59.97 per cent and 63.83 per cent for female voters in these constituencies.

Siwan, where the main contest is between Kavita Singh of JD(U) and Heena Shahab of RJD, both married to local bahubalis, the female voters appeared similarly enthusiastic as their turnout stood at 59.56 per cent as against only 50.17 per cent for men.

However, in adjoining Gopalganj (SC) and Maharajganj, which did not have any prominent female candidate, women's turnout was, similarly, about 10 per cent higher than that of men.

Patna Sahib, which covers the entire Bihar capital, saw a measly 43.07 per cent female turnout as against 49.27 per cent men. The seat is witnessing a high-profile battle between actor-turned-politician and second term MP Shatrughan Sinha, who is the contesting on a Congress ticket, and Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad who has been fielded by the BJP.

In adjoining Pataliputra, Lalu Prasad's daughter Misa Bharti's presence in the fray seems to have failed to enthuse female voters as their turnout stood at 52.40 per cent compared with 59.07 per cent for male.

Kerala: Boy goes for nasal surgery, doctor performs hernia operation instead

Manjeri (Kerala): A doctor in Kerala's Malappuram district performed a hernia surgery on a seven-year-old boy instead of removing a growth in his nasal passage after an apparent mix-up of the names of two patients.

The boy, Mohammed Danish, was operated for hernia on Tuesday at a medical college in Manjeri town, 175 km north of Kochi, sources said.

The incident came to light when Danish's parents, who are from Karuvarakundu town in the district, saw their son operated in the stomach, instead of removing his nasal polyps.

Hospital sources told PTI that there was another patient, named Dhanush, who was supposed to undergo surgery for hernia, and the mistake

occurred due to the similarity in their names.

State Health Minister K K Shylaja ordered a probe and suspended the doctor, A Suresh Kumar. "Patients must not suffer due to the negligence of the hospital staff," the minister said, adding that the boy would be given free treatment.

The state human rights commission has registered a case in connection with the incident.

"There is serious negligence on behalf of the staff including the doctor," rights panel member K Mohan Kumar said in his interim order. Kumar asked the medical college superintendent to submit a report with the statements of all the staff present inside the operation theatre.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

RESULTS TO...

The Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi had said, "We are not inclined to modify our order. (For) how many days will we hear the same matter."

In their memorandum to the EC, the Opposition parties had said that in order to make the process more transparent, paper slips must be counted first and if there is a discrepancy with what is shown digitally on the machines, then all votes - instead of the 5 per cent the EC has decided to at present - in the Assembly segment of that parliamentary constituency should be cross-checked.

Election official cite existing orders to point out that in case there is any mismatch between electronic candidate-

wise result of the Control Unit and the candidate-wise VVPAT slips manual count, recounting of the VVPAT slips of that particular VVPAT shall be conducted till the recount is tallied with the EVM count or one of the previous VVPAT slips count. Meanwhile, Twitter was abuzz on Tuesday with several videos of EVMs being stored and moved from one unauthorised storage house to another in Uttar Pradesh. The EC, however, rejected all the allegations of mishandling of EVMs and VVPAT and maintained that all machines are safe and secure.

OPP RAPS EC...

"Starting from candidate affidavits, VVPAT or VVPAT counting. Every thing cannot be correct just because EC

says so. Faith comes with Facts and intent behind actions in past," he tweeted.

The DMK also hit out at the poll body, saying its decision has blurred the distinction between an independent institution and the Central Government. "Is this democracy...? Will the Election Commission listen only to Prime Minister Narendra Modi...? senior DMK leader Duraimurugan asked.

LOSER OPP...

"Rattled by their probable defeat, these 22 parties are tarnishing the country and its democracy in the world by raising questions on the democratic process. Their demands have no rationale and are driven by selfish interests," Shah said, adding that he wanted to

ask them some questions.

Most of these Opposition parties, such as the Congress, SP, BSP, Trinamool Congress, NCP, AAP, Telugu Desam Party, Left and RJD among others, have won elections held through EVMs at some point of time, he said.

"Should it be presumed that when the Opposition wins, then it emerges victorious in elections but when it loses it does so due to EVMs? If they do not trust EVMs, then why did they form Government?", Shah asked. He said the Supreme Court has given final shape to electoral process by hearing three PILs and asked if the Opposition is raising questions on the apex court.

The Election Commission had earlier thrown an open challenge to anyone to show

that EVMs can be tampered with but no Opposition party took it up, he said.

While speaking in the dinner meet held for NDA, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had on Wednesday expressed concern over Opposition parties doubts on EVM and polling results. NDA also charged Opposition of attacking country's institutions including judiciary and EC.

IAF ACCOMPLISHES...

It said the BrahMos missile provides the IAF a much desired capability to strike from large stand-off ranges on any target at sea or on land with pinpoint accuracy by day or night and in all weather conditions.

"The capability of the missile coupled with the superla-

tive performance of the Su-30MKI aircraft gives the IAF the desired strategic reach," the IAF said. DRDO Chairman Satish Reddy and Sudhir Mishra, DG BrahMos congratulated IAF, DRDO and BrahMos team for achieving the feat. BrahMos Aerospace, an India-Russian joint venture, produces the supersonic cruise missile that can be launched from submarines, ships, aircraft, or from land platforms. The IAF has already begun work to integrate the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile on 40 Sukhoi combat aircraft. Once the project to integrate the weapon on the combat fleet is over, the IAF capability to strike from large stand-off ranges on any target in sea or land is expected to go up manifold.

Time for cricket

The great Indian political *tamasha* that we see every five years is over, now the quadrennial cricket World Cup is here



India has fond memories of the Cricket World Cup. After all, as Kapil Dev sprinted back to catch an over-the-head mishit pull off Vivian Richards back in 1983, he lifted the sterling silver Prudential Cup above his head soon after, announcing Indian cricket to the world. This victory also announced India to the world. We can debate endlessly whether we made a hash of things over the following decades, but one thing is certain, Indian cricket's dominance over the world was born that day. Today's Indian Premier League (IPL) has just cemented that status. Look at it this way, performances during the IPL have forced traditional cricket pow-

erhouses like Australia and England to make changes to their squads. But can India expect the summer of 2019 to replicate the summer of 1983?

Frankly, that appears a bit tough. Even with a tremendously talented squad led by Virat Kohli, by far and away the greatest batsman of his generation, and with elder statesman Mahendra Singh Dhoni, a man considered by all his coaches to be one of the greatest tactical minds in the game, India is not entering the World Cup as the favourite. That, not just of the bookies but also several neutral observers, is the English team. Its recent performances against Pakistan are establishing that 400-run One-Day Internationals have become the new normal after the advent of T20 cricket and a decade of the IPL. Although our batting order has historically been strong, we seem to be tapering downwards. But the boys at the top have the ability to take on any bowling attack and our middle order is in form. The pressure of a run chase will hopefully be relieved by our aggressive bowling line-up that can hold the rivals' runs pile-up and remain unpredictable till the slog overs. The bigger question is, however, if this tournament is going to be the last hurrah of One-Day International cricket? In an era of 200-plus run T20 games, which offer instant gratification for those who want constant excitement and get over quickly, can an all-day game survive? Sure, the India-Pakistan match with simmering subcontinental tensions will hopefully be a potboiler watched by over a billion people, possibly having the highest viewership of any single game in the world outside the Football World Cup. This would prove beyond an iota of doubt that despite what other sports claim, the Cricket World Cup is the world's second-most popular international tournament. But cricket must continue to spread its wings in newer territories and while the advent of Afghanistan and the resurgence of the West Indies are positive signs, having fewer non-Test playing nations participating in this World Cup is a bit of a downer, not just for the countries involved but also fans who loved seeing teams like Ireland and England in Bengaluru a few years ago. It exposes these players to IPL teams looking to make a catch, Mohammad Nabi of Afghanistan being a great example. As the Football World Cup wants to expand to an even wider reach, the International Cricket Council must also start doing the same. Cricket is unique among global sports in its ability to adapt. We went from Test-match cricket to T20 cricket via One-Day Internationals in less than a lifetime. That said, one cannot wait for the excitement of this summer's signature global sporting tournament and even if India is not the favourite, expectations are high for Virat Kohli and his men.

EC must win our trust

While EVMs are convenient, there are too many reports of tampering. A workable solution is needed in future



Granted there is a general air of mistrust over the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) ever since it was introduced, and depending on whichever party has had the unexpectedly winnable verdict, its opponents have cried foul and lodged allegations of tampering. But in one of the world's biggest democracies, there has to be mass confidence in the integrity of EVMs so that voters can trust the outcome of elections. Although the Election Commission (EC) has been stoutly claiming their tamper-proof nature, all political parties, including the BJP and Congress, have at various points in time expressed reservations and in the current election season, there have been genuine concerns about their safety being compromised during transit, storage and handling. Although there is an insurance in the form of voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPATs), the fact is its cumbersome logistics isn't a practical model of resolution. At best, the intent behind it is entirely perfunctory. This is one of the reasons why the EC has rejected the 100 per cent cross-checks of VVPATs as a workable option. But then with so many complaints and anxieties piling up, the EC cannot appear to be so intransigent about concerns and seem to be at war with voters. It must remember that it is not a comment on the adequacy of its security protocol, expert certification and administrative safeguards but about prevention of the hazardous misuse of technology that is the real devil. So as parties across India guard strongrooms and monitor the journey of EVMs to counting centres, the EC cannot discount the shadow of reasonable doubt.

The scientific fact is since EVMs aren't connected to the internet, mass manipulation is impossible because the software is "burnt" into the CPU. Of course thefts, faulty chips and breakdowns are possible. And all of it can be a result of human intervention. Many experts have claimed how a dishonest insider can get physical access to EVMs, tweak the control unit that can be programmed to count votes in a certain pattern wirelessly though that charge is a bit of an elephant passing through a hole. A simpler way would be to have an insider cast residual area votes. Fraud can also happen during the long non-election period in far-flung areas, where the EVMs are stored in basic facilities and at the stage of 'first level checks' before the machines are serviced by authorised technicians from manufacturers. It is in these outlier segments and districts, where swinging the vote stretched across narrow margins would require manipulating a minuscule number, that results could be altered. And in the Indian context, EVMs, though definitely convenient than paper ballots, cannot combat what is encoded in our DNA — human intent and ingenuity. The West is not immune to EVM malpractices either. Which is why Germany and the Netherlands, which used the machine type that is being used by us, re-introduced paper ballots. Of course, they are far less populated than India, which can consider machine-readable paper ballots going forward to cut down delays. Here, the primary ballots are in paper and the secondary ballots in electronic form unlike the current model. Agreed, technology is not our enemy but had it been perfect, original inventions would not have undergone innovations to be relevant to current time and practices. Like it or not, the onus of restoring the credibility of the democratic exercise is upon the EC and the next five years give it ample time to relook at flaws seriously than dismiss complaints as perennially motivated. It owes it to us.

The scientific fact is since EVMs aren't connected to the internet, mass manipulation is impossible because the software is "burnt" into the CPU. Of course thefts, faulty chips and breakdowns are possible. And all of it can be a result of human intervention. Many experts have claimed how a dishonest insider can get physical access to EVMs, tweak the control unit that can be programmed to count votes in a certain pattern wirelessly though that charge is a bit of an elephant passing through a hole. A simpler way would be to have an insider cast residual area votes. Fraud can also happen during the long non-election period in far-flung areas, where the EVMs are stored in basic facilities and at the stage of 'first level checks' before the machines are serviced by authorised technicians from manufacturers. It is in these outlier segments and districts, where swinging the vote stretched across narrow margins would require manipulating a minuscule number, that results could be altered. And in the Indian context, EVMs, though definitely convenient than paper ballots, cannot combat what is encoded in our DNA — human intent and ingenuity. The West is not immune to EVM malpractices either. Which is why Germany and the Netherlands, which used the machine type that is being used by us, re-introduced paper ballots. Of course, they are far less populated than India, which can consider machine-readable paper ballots going forward to cut down delays. Here, the primary ballots are in paper and the secondary ballots in electronic form unlike the current model. Agreed, technology is not our enemy but had it been perfect, original inventions would not have undergone innovations to be relevant to current time and practices. Like it or not, the onus of restoring the credibility of the democratic exercise is upon the EC and the next five years give it ample time to relook at flaws seriously than dismiss complaints as perennially motivated. It owes it to us.

China-Nepal love affair

The deepening of ties between Kathmandu and Beijing is a serious setback for New Delhi. China scored one more goal but it's difficult to say how far this story will continue



CLAUDE ARPI

In politics, there is little difference between love and sycophancy — the case of Nepal is particularly telling. The social media was recently buzzing with news that some Tibetans had protested "against an utterly ridiculous demand from Nepal's China sycophant politicians to ban the use of the *khata*, the traditional Tibetan white scarf, because it was hurting the feelings of the Chinese people." Whether true or not, the sensitivity of "hurting the feelings of the Chinese people" is nowadays prevalent all over the world with Nepali politicians at the vanguard of the movement.

The "love" has increased further after Nepal President Bidhya Devi Bhandari spent nine days in China on a State visit. The invitation had come from Chinese President Xi Jinping himself. The first part of the visit coincided with the Second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing on April 27. President Bhandari held high-level meetings with the top Chinese leadership; they "exchanged substantive views on further strengthening and consolidating the ties of co-operative friendship and mutually beneficial partnership subsisting between the two countries," according to an official communique.

More importantly, the Himalayan nation signed seven agreements with its giant northern neighbour; it included a protocol for an Agreement on Transit Transport; an accord on Cooperation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters and one on strengthening assistance and cooperation in the field of livelihood in the Northern Region of Nepal (ie the border with Tibet).

The ruling Nepal Communist Party chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, alias Prachanda, was quick to assert that a railway line will connect Kathmandu to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) "within his lifetime." Prachanda also affirmed that the railway will be later extended to Lumbini and Pokhara. It will be "a milestone in Nepal's economic development and growth of the tourism sector," he said.

The Government of Nepal had announced earlier that technical studies for the construction of railway lines linking Nepal with India and China have been completed. Bhandari specifically told the Parliament: "The Rasuwagadhi-Kathmandu railways will be started within two years." Rasuwa is the border post town with Tibet (Khyirong). The line between Shigatse and Khyirong was much delayed due to the 2015 earthquake but now it is expected to be completed by 2023.

In May 2017, Beijing had already signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Kathmandu for roads, railways, ports and aviation as well as hydropower and energy projects, finance and tourism as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. Xi assured Bhandari of China's support



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to make a "Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali." Before returning to Kathmandu, the Nepali President spent a day in Lhasa; the main purpose of the visit was re-emphasising Nepal's commitment to the "One China" policy.

As the Japanese newspaper *The Nikkei* wrote, "The price is paid in diplomatic support for Beijing: The Nepalese consulate in Lhasa, the only foreign diplomatic mission in the Tibetan capital, recently reiterated unwavering support for Beijing's claims to both Tibet and Taiwan."

Incidentally, India had a full-fledged mission in Lhasa till 1952 and a Consulate-General till 1962. Today, Beijing adamantly refuses to reopen it, wanting India to go through Nepal authorities for trans-border trade. Examples abound to show the ongoing love story. Nepal has chosen a railway track gauge used by China as standard for its network; Kathmandu justifies the choice by the lower Chinese costs. The move is a serious setback for Delhi, which has failed to limit Beijing's control over Nepal.

Minister for Physical Infrastructure and Transport Raghubir Mahaseth told

Reuters that his Government will ask India to use the Chinese gauge: "Standard gauge is less expensive," was the rationale.

Even Nepal's borders with Tibet are looked after by Beijing. According to *The Kathmandu Post*, Kathmandu has permitted the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) to provide development assistance in 15 northern districts of Nepal "to meet their developmental needs"; these districts share a common border with Tibet. The agency was set up in August 2018 in order to strengthen "the strategic planning and overall coordination of the Chinese aid to Nepal."

One unsaid objective is to stop Tibetans fleeing their native land and taking refuge in India. It has been remarkably efficient. On May 12, the Nepal Intermodal Transport Development Board signed with Tibet Fuli Construction Group, a Chinese company, an agreement to construct the inland container depot in Timure in Rasuwa district. Built with Chinese aid, the project is expected to cost \$20 million and is expected to be completed in 30 months. The

Chinese Government will construct the dry port on five hectares of land provided by Nepal; a parking yard with a capacity to park 350 trucks and containers will be built.

In another news, more on the ridiculous side, according to *The Kathmandu Post*, Nepal's leading English language newspaper, three journalists working for the Rastriya Samachar Samiti (RSS), Nepal's national news agency, are being probed for disseminating a news item regarding the Dalai Lama.

What is their crime? The journalists "translated and disseminated" a wire report about the Lama's return to Dharamsala on April 27, after he was discharged from a hospital in New Delhi. Minister for Communications and Information Technology Gokul Baskota confirmed to *The Post* that an investigation was on; Baskota said that the Tibet issue was sensitive for China and dissemination of a report regarding the Dalai Lama's health by a state-run news agency was against Nepal's commitment to "One-China policy." Sycophancy of the first order!

Also in the tragic-comedy category, Pradip Yadav of the

Samajbadi Party and Iqbal Miya of the Rastriya Janata Party, two Members of the Nepali Parliament, recently participated in an event organised by the Latvian Parliamentary Support Group for Tibet and the International Network of Parliamentarians for Tibet.

The convention in Riga was attended by Lobsang Sangay, president of the Central Tibetan Administration, along with other members of the Tibetan Parliament. Soon after, an official at the Parliament Secretariat pretended that "the two leaders said they were visiting Latvia for personal reasons and they did not disclose the details and purpose of their visit." But finally, the Nepali parliamentarian "regretted" their participation and declared that they inadvertently attended the conference because of misinformation and it was a "mistake."

China scored one more goal; but for how long the love story can continue is difficult to say, Buddha had said "everything is impermanent"...even China's great "loan" friendship?

(The writer is an expert on India-China relations)

SOUNDBITE

You (BSF) should work to enhance professionalism, capability and strength as challenges could be grave.



National Security Advisor —Ajit Doval

I want children. But with children comes the mother. I don't want the mother, but they need one. Maybe I can work out a win-win situation for everyone.



Actor —Salman Khan

It is imperative to have comprehensive reforms of the United Nations and its Security Council to make it more representative and effective.



Union Minister —Sushma Swaraj

The voters have expressed their wishes, which we will know today. Rearranging the deck chairs of a sinking ship is not the most productive activity.



Congress leader —Shashi Tharoor

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Opp playing by rules

Sir — This refers to the article, "United colours of Opposition a pipedream?" (May 22) by Kalyani Shankar. The entire nation and the media have been waiting with bated breath for May 23. Ahead of the exit polls and opinion surveys, many non-NDA allies teamed up to form strategies for a post-poll alliance. The move by Opposition parties seems to have been inspired by the exit poll results. The scenario has led to intense speculation but this is yet another learning curve for the media.

It should be noted that in a democracy, any party can form a Government either through a majority or coalition. There is no harm in some Opposition party leaders calling for a meeting to form a possible post-poll alliance. The moves of various Opposition parties should be accepted as fair, especially by the media since the results are yet to be declared. For a voter, however, it will be interesting to see how various Opposition parties scramble to find a quick solution post the announcement of results with regard to both forming a post-poll

alliance and projecting a leader as a prime ministerial candidate.

Varun SD
Bengaluru

The great reformer

Sir — This refers to the report, "Seshan, the ultimate Chief Election Commissioner" (May 21). Former Election

EC must clear the air on EVMs

Reports about surreptitious shifting of EVMs without any security in some constituencies have once again given rise to the suspicion of them being tampered with. It is now for the Election Commission (EC) to explain why the EVMs were carried away under the cover of darkness. Democracy itself is subverted when EVMs used for polling are replaced with new EVMs with the bulk of votes 'fed' in favour of a particular party. This is not to conclusively say or affirm that it is being done but to point out that a doubt to this effect has arisen in the minds of people. The charge of possible "manipulation" cannot be dismissed lightly or ignored as "frivolous" or "wild" since the sanctity of the election process is of paramount importance. Opposition parties are within their rights to flag up the issue of likely misuse of EVMs. The poll panel has to address the feared EVM tampering raised by the Opposition as a genuine concern and as an essential part of its constitutional duty "to ensure free and fair elections."



Another issue which the EC needs to act on positively is counting of VVPAT slips, especially in view of the fact that many EVMs were "faulty" and "malfunctioned." Admittedly, 100 per cent cross-checking with VVPAT paper trail is cumbersome and time-consuming. Still, convincing voters that malpractice is not involved to alter the electoral outcome must take precedence over everything else.

G David Milton
Maruthancode

Commissioner TN Seshan was revered by almost everyone for his efforts to level the playing field for the conduct of free and fair polls. His reforms in election norms made him a legend. He was popular because of his unprecedented efficiency in protecting the electoral process. In times when the political discourse has plunged to such a low, it was expected of the Election Commission to

demonstrate its credibility in punishing those parties and leaders violating the Model Code of Conduct but it remained a mute spectator to shoddy electioneering. The EC's failure to act is really sad. The country definitely needs a dynamic and unbiased electoral body and certainly officials like Seshan.

Akhil Pradhan
Dhenkanal

Declining standards

Sir — The exit poll results have deterred the Opposition so much that all 'chair' greedy politicians are running from pillar-to-post to ensure 'defeat' of the Modi Government. Truly speaking, none of the leaders or political party is interested in serving the nation. The 'unquenchable' thirst for power and money rules their minds. In fact, politics has almost become synonymous to corruption. God save the country.

Hansraj Bhat
Mumbai

Take lessons

Sir — Post the exit-poll predictions, Opposition parties have once again started to put the blame on electronic voting machines (EVMs). This only proves the fact that they have not come to terms with reality. The Opposition needs to analyse the scenario and rework strategies.

Rati Seghal
Via email

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Iranian war is unwinnable

A confrontation between Iran and the US will be a high-speed replay of the Vietnam war and the latter will lose again. It really is the stupidest idea



GWYNNE DYER

After a long debate, the highest levels of the military could not forecast a way in which things would end favourably for the United States," said Richard Clarke, counter-terrorism adviser in the White House under three administrations. That was back in 2007 and he was talking about the Pentagon's attempts to come up with a winning strategy for a US war with Iran. No matter how they gamed it, the US lost.

Two years later, in 2009, US Marine General Tony Zinni warned that any attack on Iran would lead inexorably to "boots on the ground". "If you liked Iraq and Afghanistan," he added drily, "you'll love Iran." And in 2011, Meir Dagan, former head of Mossad, Israel's national intelligence agency, said that an attack on Iran was "the stupidest idea" he had ever heard. This was all back in the days when various people in the West were talking far too loosely about war with Iran because the Iranian President at the time was a loud-mouthed extremist named Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Then he lost the 2013 election and was replaced by a moderate reformer, Hassan Rouhani.

Rouhani stopped all the aggressive talk and in 2015, he cut a deal with most of the world's major powers to put Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions, if any, on ice for at least 15 years. Everything then went quiet until another loud-mouthed extremist, Donald Trump, tore up the 2015 agreement and began talking about war with Iran again. He doesn't necessarily mean it. What Trump says on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays he often recants on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. (To make matters even more inscrutable, his threat to bring about "the end of Iran" was made last Sunday, and there are no rules for Sundays.) But he is surrounded by people who sound like they really are looking for a fight with Iran.

To be fair, Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo are probably telling themselves that plausibly terrifying US threats will suffice to crumble Iran. Only National Security Adviser John Bolton understands that the threats will cause Iranian reactions that can then be used as an excuse for an actual attack (and he's just fine with that). So is the scenario of a US attack on Iran, with or without Saudi Arabian and Israeli help, still as hopeless a project as it was 10 years ago? It's not hopeless at all if you just drop nuclear weapons on the 20 biggest Iranian cities. That's not enough to cause a nuclear winter but quite enough to kill between a quarter and a half of Iran's 80 million people. If you do that (and either the US or Israel could do it single-handedly), the Iranians will never come back for a rematch.

But neither the US or Israel is going to do that. It would make them literally the enemies of all mankind. And short of doing that, there are no good options for winning a war against Iran because (as in all 'asymmetric' conflicts) the Iranians don't need a winning strategy. All they have to do is not lose. The US and its friends could certainly destroy all of Iran's military and industrial facilities by 'conventional' bombing, including most of the underground facilities. (The Iranians, having lived with threats like this for a long time, have done a good deal of digging.)

The attackers could also destroy all the utilities like water, sewage and electrical power that make urban life possible, forcing millions of Iranian city-dwellers into refugee camps in rural areas. The Iranians might be able to shoot a few of the attacking planes and missiles down, but not many. But none of this would force the Iranians to surrender, nor would it prevent Iran from stopping all the tankers going into and out of the Persian Gulf (which transport most of the oil burned in India, China and Japan). Iran's sea-skimming missiles can be fired from mobile launchers anywhere along 3,000 km of coastline and have the range to reach the other side at any point. So in the end, if you're serious, it would have to be "boots on the ground", just as Zinni said. But the ground war is unwinnable, too. Iran's Army is about the same size as that of the US but it could quickly expand to 10 times that size with volunteers as it did during the US-backed Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980-88. And Iran is as large as France.

Would the Iranians volunteer in such numbers? Of course, they would. Many Iranians don't like the current regime but they are patriots. They are as unlikely to welcome a US invasion as American liberals would be to welcome a foreign invasion promising to liberate them from Trump. The Iranian volunteers would be poorly armed and they would die in droves but if only one American soldier died for every 10 Iranians, the US public would quickly reach its maximum tolerance level for American casualties. It would be a high-speed replay of the Vietnam war, and the US would lose again. So don't do it. Don't even think about it. It really is the stupidest idea.

ELECTION COMMISSION MEANS 'ERADICATED CREDIBILITY' AND EVMS HAVE BECOME 'ELECTRONIC VICTORY MACHINES' FOR THE BJP. —CONGRESS LEADER ABHISHEK MANU SINGHVI

POINTCOUNTERPOINT



DOUBTING EVMS MEANS THAT OPPOSITION PARTIES DOUBT THE PEOPLE AND SHOWS THAT THEY ARE AFRAID OF LOSING. —UNION MINISTER PRAKASH JAVADEKAR

Port of opportunities missed

The re-imposition of US sanctions on Iran is the biggest threat to the Chabahar port. Both India and Iran must muster enough political will and economic rationale to justify its worth



AVEEK SEN

Amid escalating tensions between the US and Iran, Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's Foreign Minister, made a brief visit to New Delhi on May 14 to hold talks with his Indian counterpart Sushma Swaraj on the impact of US sanctions on his country's oil industry. His trip came soon after he visited the United Nations. Post his visit, Zarif gave an interview to *Fox News Sunday*, which is being seen as an attempt to reach out to US President Donald Trump, whose disdain for the media as peddlers of "fake news" is not hidden. Zarif then headed to Qatar to attend a ministerial meeting of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue and then to Russia and Turkmenistan. While Zarif was in Russia, President Hassan Rouhani announced that Iran would cease to abide by certain nuclear limitations but stopped short of violating its 2015 nuclear deal. In this context, it is important that the fourth trip of Zarif in this leg is to India and the third after the US cancelled our sanctions waivers for import of Iranian oil.

During his visit, Zarif held discussions with Swaraj on issues of mutual interest, including the situation in Afghanistan, the development of Chabahar port, cooperation in various fields and regional and international issues. Regarding the ongoing US-Iran tensions, India made its stand clear that any decision on oil purchase from Iran will have to wait for the new Government in Delhi. But here, we will focus on issues concerning the implementation of the Chabahar port project — those as a result of the latest round of sanctions, though the port is out of the immediate purview of bans, and in general.

To clear the air, the purpose of the Chabahar port to be developed by India is entirely different from the Gwadar port in Pakistan being developed by China. The Chabahar is strictly an economic project and not a strategic-military one. On the other hand, China does not need Gwadar to trade with Central Asia or Russia — it has shorter land routes to conduct business. Moreover, the "String of Pearls" theory on potential Chinese intentions in the Indian Ocean Region isn't taken seriously by either the bureaucracy or in think-tank circles. It is seen as an American attempt to sow India-China tensions and the term itself is coined in a US Army War College paper.

Though the Chabahar project is a potential game-changer as it offers a gateway to Central Asia and Europe but as of now, its potential remains largely untapped. Additionally, the US sanctions regime has not just delayed the project since the early 2000s but has also been stifling its growth. It is going to take a few years for Chabahar to register success and it is, perhaps, too early to sing paeans about it. To cite an example, the ambitious plan suffered a blow with manufacturers shying away from supplying essential equipment like cranes and forklifts for the construction of the Iranian port even when US sanctions had not kicked in late last year. Indian promises to delivery ratio, too, have been dismal during this Government's tenure. Further, while greater funds were promised, much smaller amounts have been released.

This writer spoke to Mohsen Shariatnia, an assistant professor of regional studies at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran, when he said that

“THE RUSSIAN MARKET HAS A HUGE POTENTIAL FOR INDIAN BUSINESSES AND IF INDIA CAN CONNECT ITS RISING ECONOMY WITH ANOTHER BIG ECONOMY LIKE RUSSIA, IT WILL BE A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO ENHANCE COOPERATION BETWEEN IRAN AND INDIA ALONG THE CHABAHAR. CONNECTING JUST INDIAN AND RUSSIAN ECONOMIES WILL CREATE ENOUGH ECONOMIC JUSTIFICATION FOR INSTC AND THE CHABAHAR PROJECT



the "Chabahar is a mega project but it's too early to judge the success or failure of this project." Speaking about the Mumbai-Mundra-Kandla-Chabahar-Bandar Abbas shipping line, that connects the Indian city of Mumbai to Iranian southern port cities of Chabahar and Bandar Abbas and which was inaugurated only recently, he said that the main problem with this project was about financial resources. The Rouhani administration does not have enough money and the private sector has no economic motivation to invest in this line. If the two countries can reach an agreement on financial resources, a major issue would be resolved.

Shariatnia added that beyond the Indian Government, creating the economic justification of Chabahar for Indian companies is also very important. If they can access Central Asia and Russia markets via the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), they can motivate investment and participation for this project. The future of Chabahar will depend on the political will of the Iranian and Indian Government on the one hand and economic justification of Chabahar for Indian and Iranian companies on the other.

Shariatnia added that in his assessment, the importance of the Russian economy is much more than Central Asia economies. If one takes a look at recent developments in Central Asia, one will notice that China is the biggest player and that there is no crucial capability or opportunity within the central Asian economy to be filled by India, Iran or other countries because China is

already a dominant country in this geo-economic scene. The Russian market, on the other hand, has a huge potential for Indian businesses and if India can connect its rising economy with another big economy like Russia, it will be a great opportunity to enhance cooperation between Iran and India along the Chabahar. In my assessment, connecting just Indian and Russian economies will create enough economic justification for INSTC and Chabahar project.

This writer spoke to Behrooz Aghaei, ports and maritime director general of Sistan and Baluchistan province. Chabahar port comes under his jurisdiction. He said that despite what appears at first glance, the "Chabahar port's exemption from sanctions" granted by the US is not going to help the people of Afghanistan. In fact, it increases transit expenses of its commodities by imposing sanctions on ports (which could have been better alternatives economically) and puts further restrictions on Afghan merchants. Analysis reveals that imposing sanctions on Iran's ports as the most secure and less expensive routes for Afghanistan implies imposing sanctions on Afghanistan itself.

Aghaei says that as far as India is concerned, the significant point is that Indian commodities that transit to Afghanistan don't have enough trade volumes to rationalise marine and road transportation expenses. Bearing in mind the trade volume of Afghanistan, Russia and CIS countries, which altogether is more than 16 million tonnes, and the insignificant share of Afghanistan, it can be said that without

making possible the transportation of all India's merchandise to the above-mentioned countries through Chabahar port, the so-called exemption of this port does not make any noticeable change in India's trade. Therefore, Chabahar port's exemption will only be a competitive advantage for India if all our merchandise for Afghanistan, Russia and CIS countries could be transported through the port without any restriction on banking transactions and insurance.

Aghaei adds that the noteworthy point about Afghanistan is that the exemption of Chabahar port will only be useful if there is no prohibition on vessels carrying merchandise entering and leaving it as well as on commercial transactions of cargo owners, merchants and shipping lines. Particularly banking transactions should be done without limitation.

The US may not agree to it. Its aim to provide a sanctions waiver to Afghanistan is to allow imports into that country. It is not concerned with the profits made by the Chabahar port. But it definitely will have an impact on the growth of the port. While Iran is under sanctions, Chabahar can never realise its full potential of being a route for Indo-Russia trade and trade to Europe via INSTC. Gwadar got a headstart over Chabahar, which was planned earlier, due to the US-Iran tensions and sanctions. Will we see Chabahar lag behind in trade due to it?

(The writer is an independent journalist working on cyber security and the geopolitics of India's neighbourhood, focussing on Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Bangladesh)

How to end the plastic kingdom

The dismal global recycling statistics do make us wonder whether we will ever efficiently adopt 100 per cent recycling of plastics. A more fundamental solution is to switch to variants from biodegradable sources like wood, corn starch and sugarcane



KOTA SRIRAJ

Plastics have for long been associated as an environmental contaminant. Slowly but irretrievably, rampant use of this material is adversely impacting the climate system. This is apparent from the fact that our once pristine habitat and fragile ecology, the flora and fauna, are getting increasingly eroded. The damaging impact is clear not only on land but also on the oceans. Newly published research calculates that across their life cycle, plastics account for 3.8 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. That's almost double the emissions of the aviation sector. If it were a country, the "Plastic Kingdom" would be the fifth-high-

est emitter in the world.

Insatiable demand for plastic is fuelling the almost endless pursuit to procure all things made out of it and the bad news is that this burgeoning demand is all set to grow. At 380 metric tonnes a year, we produce 190 times more plastic than we did in 1950. If the demand for plastic continues to grow at its current rate of four per cent a year, emissions from plastic production will reach 15 per cent of global emissions by 2050. This toxic increase in the use of plastic will surely send the environment and climate into a shock unless measures are taken to bring down the plastic exposure.

More than 99 per cent of plastics are manufactured from petrochemicals, most commonly from petroleum and natural gas. These raw materials are refined to form ethylene, propylene, butene and other basic plastic building blocks, before being transported to manufacturers. The production and transport of these resins require an awful lot of energy — and, therefore, fuel. Greenhouse gas emissions

also occur during the refining process itself — the "cracking" of larger hydrocarbons from petrochemicals into smaller ones suitable for making plastic releases carbon dioxide and methane. According to the study, about 61 per cent of total plastic greenhouse gas emissions comes from the resin production and transport stage.

A further 30 per cent is emitted at the product manufacturing stage. The vast majority of these emissions come from the energy required to power the plants that turn raw plastic materials into the bottles, bin bags and bicycle helmets we use today. The remainder occurs as a result of chemical and manufacturing processes — for example, the production of plastic foams uses HFCs, particularly potent greenhouse gases. The remaining carbon footprint occurs when plastics are thrown away. Incineration releases all of the stored carbon in the plastic into the atmosphere, as well as air pollutants such as dioxins, furans, mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls, which are toxic and

damaging to human health.

As plastics take centuries to degrade, disposal in landfill makes only a small contribution to emissions in theory. However, as much as 40 per cent of landfill waste is burnt in open skies, dramatically speeding up the release of otherwise locked-up carbon.

If we are to combat climate breakdown, reductions in plastic emissions are clearly needed. Thankfully, the solution with the biggest potential is already in motion, albeit slow. In showing that transitioning to a zero carbon energy system has the potential to reduce emissions from plastic by 51 per cent, the study provides yet another reason to rapidly phase out fossil fuels. However, beyond urgently required global decarbonisation, we need to reduce our seemingly insatiable demand for carbon-based plastic. Increasing recycling rates is one simple way of doing this.

The highest-quality plastics can be recycled many times, and nearly all plastic can be recycled to some extent — but only 18 per cent was

actually recycled worldwide in 2015. Although each recycle process requires a small amount of new plastic, we can greatly increase the life cycle of the material by efficiently reusing what we make. But the dismal global recycling statistics do make us wonder whether we will ever efficiently adopt 100 per cent recycling of plastics. To counter this, a more fundamental solution is to switch to making plastics from biodegradable sources such as wood, corn starch and sugarcane.

The materials themselves are carbon neutral, although renewable power is essential to eliminate the climate impact of energy costs during production, transport and waste processing. However, a massive ramping up in the production of bioplastics — which currently make up less than one per cent of total plastic production — would require vast swathes of agricultural land. With the population set to rise dramatically, increasingly coveted arable space may not be able to satisfy demand. The bottom line, therefore, is that we will need to

reduce our demand for plastic. According to the study, simply reducing the annual growth in plastics demand from four per cent to two per cent could result in 60 per cent lower emissions from the sector in 2050.

While a life without plastics may seem unimaginable, it's worth remembering that their prevalence is a relatively recent phenomenon. The first artificial plastic, Bakelite, was developed in 1907, but it wasn't until the 1950s that the age of plastic began. If we show a genuine appetite to address plastic pollution, the world could change again just as quickly and so will the environment — for the better.

Governments, corporations, and individuals must make research into alternatives a priority and support their use to needless plastic waste. Of course, any of these solutions alone will not be enough but if we manage to do all of this, then we can cut plastics emissions to just seven per cent of current levels.

(The writer is an environmental journalist)



FOREIGN EYE



MYSTERIOUS FINANCES

It's difficult to see how the Brexit party's statements about funding will meet the requirements of the act governing the polls. It is essential to establish that donations have come only from permissible donors, and are reported publicly if above a certain size. This information ought to be revealed within seven business days as in some Australian states. Democracy costs money. But money must not cost Britain its democracy. (The Guardian Editorial)

Sensex surps 140 pts ahead of poll outcome

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The benchmark BSE Sensex ended 140 points higher Wednesday, bolstered by gains in banking and auto stocks ahead of the general election results.

After swinging over 300 points during the day, the 30-share index ended 140.41 points, or 0.36 per cent, higher at 39,110.21. The gauge hit an intra-day high of 39,249.08 and a low of 38,903.87.

In similar movement, the broader NSE Nifty rose 28.80 points, or 0.25 per cent, to 11,737.90.

IndusInd Bank was the biggest gainer in the Sensex pack, rallying 4.84 per cent, followed by Sun Pharma, Bajaj Auto, Bharti Airtel, Coal India, Tata Motors, SBI, ICICI Bank, Hero MotoCorp, ONGC, HDFC, Vedanta, L&T, Kotak Bank, Maruti and Axis Bank, ending up to 2.92 per cent higher.

On the other hand, Yes Bank, ITC, PowerGrid, TCS and HUL closed in the red, slipping up to 2.34 per cent.

According to experts, investor sentiment turned positive this week after most

exit polls forecast a win for the Narendra Modi-led NDA. The results of the seven-phased polls will come out Thursday.

"Post the exit polls, one can say that the markets seem to have priced in a second term for the Modi government. However, lack of majority for BJP will prove to be a dampener for market mood. Hung elections remain a near term threat for the markets.

"Post elections, the focus will revert back to the fundamental issues such as earnings growth and increase in capex," said Hemang Jani, Head - Advisory, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

Unabated foreign fund inflows too buoyed market mood here, traders said.

Foreign institutional investors net bought equities worth Rs 1,185.44 crore on Tuesday, while domestic institutional investors sold shares to the tune of Rs 1,090.32 crore, provisional data available with stock exchanges showed.

Sectorally, the BSE bankex, capital goods, industrials, oil and gas, finance, auto and energy indices ended up to 0.89 per cent higher.

DHFL curbs premature withdrawals; shares tank

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Cash-starved Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd (DHFL) has decided to restrict premature withdrawal of deposits and stop accepting fresh deposits as part of reorganising its "liability management" efforts, sources said.

"In view of the recent revision in the credit rating of our fixed deposit programme, acceptance of all fresh deposits, as well as renewals, has been put on hold with immediate effect.

"Further, to help us reorganise our liability management, the premature withdrawal of deposits has also been put on hold. This is completely under NHB regulation," one of the sources said.

National Housing Bank (NHB) norms do not allow companies to raise deposits if they do not have an investment grade rating.

According to the sources, the company will continue to honour its all premature deposit withdrawal requests in

cases such as medical or financial emergency, provided the customers produce valid documents.

"Over the last few weeks there have been several unwarranted speculation in the market about the creditworthiness of DHFL and the company stands committed to honour all its liability payments," one of the sources said.

DHFL stock Wednesday settled 9.85 per cent down at Rs 117.10 on the BSE.

The company has cleared liabilities of nearly Rs 30,000

crore since September 2018, the sources added.

For the past eight months, Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) have been reeling under liquidity crunch against the backdrop of debt defaults by IL&FS group companies and others.

On May 10, DHFL clarified on unwarranted speculation in the market about continuous weakening of the company's credit profile.

"We would like to place on record that the slowdown in business activity in the industry

has not had any adverse impact on DHFL's debt repayment ability or loan servicing and collections of the company," it had said.

From a servicing standpoint, collection efficiency has remained over 99 per cent every month since September 2018, DHFL had said.

On Tuesday, the RBI decided to have a specialised cadre for supervision and regulation of NBFCs and other financial institutions.

Earlier this month, Corporate Affairs Secretary

Injeti Srinivas in an interview to PTI had said the NBFC sector was facing issues of credit squeeze, over-leveraging and misadventures by some large entities.

"There is an imminent crisis in the NBFC sector. There is a credit squeeze, over-leveraging, excessive concentration, massive mismatch between assets and liabilities, coupled with some misadventures by some very large entities, which is a perfect recipe for disaster," Srinivas had said.

No personal data exposed: Chtrbox

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mumbai-based Chtrbox, which was allegedly responsible for leaking data of millions of Instagram users, has said database for a limited number of influencers was inadvertently exposed but that did not include any sensitive personal data.

The company termed the reports of private data being leaked as "inaccurate" and acknowledged that "a particular database for limited influencers was inadvertently exposed for approximately 72 hours".

"This database did not include any sensitive personal

data and only contained information available from the public domain, or self reported by influencers," it said in a statement late Tuesday night.

On Tuesday, Facebook-owned Instagram said it is investigating whether a third-party — Chtrbox — improperly stored its user data in violation of its policies after reports that information of millions of users being available online allegedly in an unsecured database emerged.

These reports said the database found online — with over 49 million records — contained information of

millions of Instagram influencers, celebrities and brand accounts. The database was allegedly traced back to Chtrbox.

The reports had said apart from public data (like bio, profile picture and number of followers), the database also allegedly contained users' private contact information such as email address and phone number.

An Instagram spokesperson had said the company is "investigating whether a third party improperly stored Instagram data, in violation of our policies. It's also not clear whether the phone numbers and e-mails in

Chtrbox's database came from Instagram".

Chtrbox, in its statement, asserted that no personal data has been sourced through unethical means by the company.

"Our database is for internal research use only, we have never sold individual data or our database, and we have never purchased hacked data resulting from social media platform breaches. Our use of our database is limited to help our team connect with the right influencers to support influencers to monetize their online presence, and help brands create great content," it added.

SpiceJet launches 20 new domestic flights

Mumbai (PTI): Budget carrier SpiceJet Wednesday announced the launch of 20 new domestic flights, with 18 of them connecting the financial capital with a host of metro and non-metro cities.

The new services, which include flights to regional destinations such as Thiruvananthapuram, Vijayawada and Tirupati from Mumbai, will be launched between May 26 and May 30, SpiceJet said in a statement. All new flights being introduced will be operated daily, except the one for Mumbai-Kolkata route which will be not be operational on Wednesday and Sunday, with Boeing 737 NG aircraft, the release said. Starting April 1, SpiceJet has announced 106 new flights, which include 73 connecting Mumbai, 16 connecting Delhi and 8 flights between Mumbai and Delhi, in an effort to partially offset the capacity loss across domestic and international routes in the wake of Jet Airways grounding. With the new flights, passengers from Thiruvananthapuram, Vijayawada, Goa, Hyderabad, Tirupati, Kochi, Kolkata, Kanpur and Patna will be able to travel to a host of other cities, both on SpiceJet's domestic as well as international network via Mumbai, the airline said.

NIFTY 50

SCRIP	OPEN	High	LOW	LTP	CHANGE
NIFTY 50	11727.95	11784.80	11682.40	11737.90	28.80
INDUSINDBK	1446.95	1536.85	1382.30	1528.00	80.25
SUNPHARMA	409.00	423.55	408.00	423.00	14.15
BAJAJ-AUTO	2980.05	3054.00	2973.15	3053.95	74.65
BPL	378.00	388.90	376.00	383.25	8.80
EICHERMOT	2095.00	2130.00	2074.50	2128.00	383.25
HEROMOTOCO	357.40	371.70	363.00	370.50	47.80
BHARTIARTL	311.00	337.95	328.65	335.00	5.85
COALINDIA	237.65	242.00	237.10	241.00	3.80
TATAMOTORS	177.60	180.40	174.80	179.50	2.70
SBI	338.90	342.60	333.55	342.50	4.95
IOC	155.00	156.75	152.25	155.70	2.20
ICICIBANK	400.00	408.40	401.55	405.40	5.25
ONGC	174.85	178.00	174.15	177.00	2.25
HDFC	212.40	215.20	211.90	214.55	27.05
HUL	100.00	101.85	99.35	101.20	12.15
NTPC	128.60	130.45	127.40	130.00	1.40
IT	145.10	147.30	144.10	146.60	14.50
HINDALCO	196.00	199.35	195.00	197.95	1.95
HCLTECH	1057.00	1075.00	1063.70	1063.20	7.10
AXISBANK	774.80	784.00	770.20	778.00	5.05
VEDL	164.50	167.90	164.70	166.50	1.05
KOTAKBANK	109.00	115.70	108.70	109.65	7.75
BAFINANCE	344.20	349.55	339.05	348.95	15.65
ASIANPAINT	136.50	137.75	134.05	136.30	5.35
MARUTI	817.20	830.55	814.00	820.00	24.65
BAIHANSV	894.00	927.00	890.00	921.50	29.60
RELIANCE	1345.65	1359.70	1335.10	1344.00	4.20
M&M	643.85	643.85	631.25	640.95	1.80
HDFCBANK	2411.85	2426.00	2394.25	2410.00	6.30
ULTRACEMCO	4662.70	4673.65	4592.00	4652.00	12.25
BRITANNIA	286.00	287.80	281.50	285.50	6.30
DREDDY	2664.90	2679.90	2621.85	2670.00	3.00
INFY	710.00	718.25	707.00	709.95	0.65
TATASTEEL	472.00	480.55	467.40	479.50	0.40
TITAN	125.95	125.90	126.35	124.00	-0.40
ITC	302.15	302.80	296.80	300.05	-0.10
ADANIAPORTS	389.00	393.45	378.40	385.65	-1.95
GAIL	338.70	341.75	334.20	336.95	-1.75
GRASIM	868.60	868.60	849.00	860.90	-4.70
HINDUNILVR	1785.00	1785.00	1747.35	1773.75	-11.50
POWERGRID	183.90	185.30	181.80	182.50	-1.45
TCS	211.00	212.95	207.50	209.00	-19.75
JSWSTEEL	280.40	281.25	273.20	276.20	-2.70
CIFLA	562.00	574.00	550.05	553.90	-5.45
WIPRO	287.00	287.50	281.00	283.40	-3.50
ZEEL	349.95	350.95	339.20	343.00	-4.70
YESBANK	141.00	141.25	135.50	138.90	-2.10
INFRATEL	275.85	280.90	268.95	269.15	-6.95
IBULHGFIN	802.00	808.15	774.80	784.00	-23.75
TECHM	758.00	767.35	744.00	750.00	-23.05

NIFTY NEXT 50

SCRIP	OPEN	High	LOW	LTP	CHANGE
NIFTY NEXT 50	26927.15	26937.40	26670.70	26888.05	-11.00
IDEA	11.85	12.30	11.90	12.25	0.45
BHEL	63.60	65.60	62.15	63.35	2.10
HDFCAMC	1660.00	1710.00	1660.00	1703.65	46.95
INDIGO	1500.00	1516.80	1468.00	1510.50	33.45
CADILAH	244.40	251.65	242.10	250.20	5.45
BANDHANBNK	589.60	608.80	586.50	600.00	12.40
DMART	1280.00	1303.80	1265.00	1298.00	25.90
NMDC	93.05	95.50	93.05	94.75	1.70
PAGEIND	22398.80	22630.30	22000.05	22570.00	379.10
ABB	1425.00	1461.50	1401.20	1453.10	24.25
LUPIN	748.00	760.95	741.65	760.00	12.60
DLF	175.90	181.20	172.00	173.95	2.45
PIDILITIND	1204.90	1215.95	1182.55	1215.00	15.15
HINDPETRO	286.45	295.90	286.10	288.10	3.55
CONCOR	483.10	487.35	471.00	487.30	4.45
SAIL	50.85	51.15	49.20	50.85	0.45
BANKBARODA	126.70	128.00	124.95	126.75	0.95
MARICO	363.50	366.80	361.65	364.00	2.65
DABUR	383.00	386.95	378.85	385.65	2.70
MRF	5499.00	5520.00	5450.05	5510.00	327.90
ASHOKLEY	88.85	89.00	85.90	87.00	0.45
OFSS	3408.00	3433.35	3395.00	3419.85	16.85
ACC	1620.80	1634.50	1607.60	1616.65	6.15
UBL	1424.20	1432.80	1373.85	1429.90	3.70
NHPC	22.95	23.05	22.70	22.90	0.00
ICICIPRULI	347.10	352.30	347.50	347.50	0.70
AMBUJACEM	220.50	223.15	218.70	220.75	0.30
GODREJCP	663.50	669.15	654.50	658.90	0.95
NIACL	163.70	168.80	161.55	163.60	-0.05
DIVISLAB	1704.90	1706.20	1670.00	1695.00	-1.50
BIOCON	520.85	523.95	516.00	517.50	-1.35
SBLIFE	659.70	667.55	652.85	657.35	-1.95
AUROPHARMA	670.00	674.80	663.00	664.30	-2.15
COLPAL	1161.00	1169.25	1146.00	1153.80	-4.10
HAVELLS	758.25	765.00	741.00	755.10	-2.80
GICRE	22.05	23.00	22.50	22.60	-1.35
BAJAJHLING	3327.85	3329.00	3260.00	3271.35	-33.00
MOTHERSUMI	121.45	121.70	117.30	119.20	-1.30
PGH	1080.10	1086.10	1064.00	1073.00	-117.30
SIEMENS	1181.10	1189.90	1156.00	1170.00	-13.05
HDFCLIFE	404.00	406.00	396.30	398.55	-4.65
L&TH	124.95	125.40	120.30	123.40	-1.45
PETRONET	238.20	239.30	234.35	237.40	-2.90
SHRECEM	20352.00	20480.65	20022.00	20200.00	-280.65
ICICI	1149.00	1155.00	1130.50	1130.50	-16.75
HINDZINC	254.40	265.00	249.50	251.00	-4.25
SIRTRANSFIN	1085.00	1085.00	1047.50	1067.00	-19.05
MCDOWELL-N	552.70	552.70	538.75	541.40	-9.75
PEL	2209.05	2218.55	2140.00	2184.00	-44.40
BOSCHLTD	1730.10	1737.90	1675.00	1681.50	-595.70

BSE 500

Script	Open	High	Low	LTP	UNIONBANK	74.25	74.50	70.75	71.60	HEXWARE	357.00	364.50	355.70	357.65	HINDZINC	264.90	264.90	254.15	255.30	SUNDRMFAST	532.00	535.00	519.00	521.20
SUZLON	5.99	6.22	5.40	5.51	FORCEMOT	1510.00	1585.00	1490.15	1525.05	NIITTECH	1266.55	1301.85	1263.65	1290.05	EQUITAS	135.80	137.05	132.30	133.00	IEX	148.55	152.95		

India determined to fight terrorism, Swaraj tells SCO

Pak, Russia reach pact on outer space

PTI ■ BISHKEK
India on Wednesday said the ghastly bombings in Sri Lanka at a time when the wounds of the Pulwama terror attack were still raw in people's mind has made it more determined to resolutely fight against the menace.

Addressing the meeting of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Council of Foreign Ministers here in the Kyrgyz capital, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said India is determined to consistently strengthen cooperation within the SCO framework for comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security.

"Our heart goes out to our brothers and sisters of Sri Lanka, who have recently witnessed the ghastly act of terrorism. Our wounds of Pulwama attack were still raw and the news from the neighbourhood has made us more determined to resolutely fight against this menace," Swaraj said at the meeting, also attended by Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi.

Nine suicide bombers carried out a series of devastating blasts that tore through three churches and as many luxury hotels on April 21, killing more than 250 people and injuring

500 others. The ISIS terror group claimed the attacks, but the government blamed the local Islamist extremist group National Thawheed Jammath (NTJ) for the Ester Sunday bombings.

The attack came months after India witnessed a suicide attack by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed on CRPF personnel in Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir, killing 40 soldiers.

Swaraj said India is open to ideas on how we can make the work of Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS), which specifically deals with issues relating to security and defence, more effective.

In spite of a turbulent global scenario, SCO member states have been steadily expanding mutually beneficial cooperation in various spheres, including political, security and development, Swaraj said.

She said that India is committed to continue working for a favourable environment for the SCO member countries' economic activities and to intensify work on the relevant SCO documents dealing with economic and trade cooperation.

"India subscribes to a rule-based, transparent, non-discriminatory, open and inclusive



External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj delivers her statement at Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council of Foreign Ministers in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) on Wednesday

multilateral trading system, centered around the World Trade Organisation, and firmly oppose unilateralism and protectionism," she said, amidst the trade war between China and the US.

India was an observer at the SCO since 2005 and has

generally participated in the ministerial-level meetings of the grouping which focus mainly on security and economic cooperation in the Eurasian region.

Along with India, Pakistan was also granted the SCO membership in 2017.

The SCO was founded at a summit in Shanghai in 2001 by the presidents of Russia, China, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Swaraj said science and technology led innovation and the digital economy are the key areas which could play an

important role in the long-term inclusive and sustainable growth.

India has adopted a multi-pronged welfare approach, which includes — development of human resources, promoting R&D and innovation, enhancing efficiency through digital services and ensuring a secure cyber space.

Swaraj said India is committed to regional connectivity which is evident from its involvement in the International North-South Transport Corridor, Chabahar Port, Ashgabat Agreement and India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway.

"We have also operationalised air freight corridors between Kabul and Kandahar and New Delhi and Mumbai in 2017. We welcome regional connectivity initiatives, that are inclusive, sustainable, transparent and respect the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity," Swaraj said, apparently referring to India's objection to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor which passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

She said India supports initiatives for capacity building, human resource development and fostering greater interaction among the youth of the region.

India, she said, is ready to share its expertise with other SCO members in such fields as agriculture, medicine, Information Technology, space, finance and renewable energy.

"India stands committed to any process, which can help Afghanistan emerge as a united, peaceful, secure, stable, inclusive and economically vibrant nation, with guaranteed gender and human rights. I wish to once again underscore the importance India attaches to SCO Afghanistan Contact Group and welcome an early conclusion of the draft roadmap of further actions of the Contact Group," she said.

The group was established in 2005 in order to draft recommendations and proposals on SCO-Afghanistan cooperation in areas of mutual concern. It was decided at the SCO summit held in Astana, Kazakhstan, in July 2017 that the group's activities need to be adjusted following the expansion of the SCO's membership.

India welcomes the increased international engagement of the SCO with other international and regional organisations and the fruitful efforts of the SCO Secretariat in forging cooperation in the cultural and humanitarian spheres.

Bishkek/Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan and Russia Wednesday voiced concern over the weaponisation of the outer space and vowed to prevent it from becoming an arena for military confrontation, nearly two months after India shot down one of its satellites in space with an anti-satellite missile.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov signed a joint statement on 'No First Placement of Weapons in Outer Space' on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Council of Foreign Ministers' meeting in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

The joint statement said that the outer space should be used in compliance with international law for the benefit of all nations, regardless of the level of their economic, scientific or technological development.

Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO) in statement said that the two countries share a common position on the prevention of arms race in outer space and work collectively in various international fora towards that goal.

"The signing of the joint statement on No First Placement of Weapons in Outer Space is a reflection of convergence of views between the two sides," it said. The FO said Pakistan and Russia reiterated their commitment to refrain from the threat or use of force in outer space activities. "We encourage other responsible space-faring nations to follow this example," it added.

The joint statement emphasised that the achievement of an international treaty preventing the arms race in outer space as well as banning the placement or use of weapons therein is a priority for the international community.

It said the two countries "declare that they will not in any way be the first to place weapons of any kind in Outer Space, that they will make all possible efforts to prevent Outer Space from becoming an arena for military confrontation and to ensure security in Outer Space activities."

West urge swift Sudan accord to install civil rule
AFF ■ KHARTOUM (SUDAN)
The United States, Britain and Norway called for a swift agreement between Sudanese protesters and generals on installing civilian rule, saying it would be harder for them to work with any other new authority. Talks between protest leaders and army generals who seized power after ousting longtime leader Omar al-Bashir last month have stopped since late Monday following disagreement about who should lead a new ruling body — a civilian or a soldier.

The Western troika, which has previously been involved in mediation in Sudanese conflicts, said the country "urgently needs an agreement" to end the period of uncertainty, according to a joint statement released late Tuesday.

"Any outcome that does not result in the formation of a government that is civilian-led, placing primary authority for governing with civilians, will not respond to the clearly expressed will of the Sudanese people for a transition to civilian rule," it said. "This will complicate international engagement, and make it harder for our countries to work with the new authorities and support Sudan's economic development," added the statement.

China delivers first overhauled JF-17 fighter jet to Pakistan

PTI ■ BEIJING
In a major boost for the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), China has delivered the first overhauled multi-role JF-17 fighter jet to Islamabad as part of a project undertaken by the two countries for the development and manufacture of the aircraft.

China and Pakistan had begun joint development and manufacture of the single-engine light JF-17 jets over a decade ago. Beijing delivered the first batch in 2007 and a number of them were later commissioned by the PAF, state-run Global Times reported on Wednesday.

After a decade of use, it was time for the first JF-17s to undergo overhauls, the report quoted military analysts as saying, adding that the first overhaul started in November 2017 after a contract was signed between the two sides in 2016.

Changsha 5712 Aircraft Industry Co Ltd under the state-owned Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC) reassembled the jet and delivered it to its Pakistani client in March, the daily quoted a report by China Aviation News.

This is also the first time AVIC has overhauled a made-for-export third generation fighter, or fourth generation

according to another widely used standard, the report said. "The first [JF-17] overhaul marks an important milestone [in the JF-17 project]," Fu Qianshao, a Chinese air defence expert, said.

It represents the trial-and-error phase of the project and provided experience in establishing standards for other JF-17 overhauls in future, Qianshao said.

The overhaul of the fighter jet includes major maintenance, featuring repairs and replacement of old components, including the airframe and engine.

Also, a Block 3 variant of the JF-17 is under development. It is expected to be much more powerful than the previous two blocks due to new China-developed active electronically scanned array radar, the report said.

Though China has made significant strides in avionics and developed new range of war planes including stealth fighters, it is yet to develop engines for its planes, including JF-17 and mostly rely on Russian supplies.

Qianshao said that while standard, regular maintenance could be done by the military, an overhaul usually needs to be conducted by a designated and more capable supplier due to

higher complexity. Such an overhaul can ensure flight safety after years of use. It might also equip the aircraft with newer technologies that enhance its capability, or prolong the aircraft's lifespan, he said.

Pakistan sent dozens of trainees to China, who had close communication and built deep friendships with Chinese engineers during the overhaul process.

Qianshao said since procedures and standards for the overhaul have been established, future overhauls on other JF-17s could be done by Pakistani personnel. "Under the framework of China-Pakistan cooperation, Pakistan's aviation industry will continue to develop," he noted.

JF-17 has become a mainstay of the PAF in recent years after US restricted sales of F-16 war planes after the 1990 arms embargo imposed on Pakistan under the Pressler amendment. It is reported to have over 100 JF-17 planes with more in the pipeline.

JF17 is part of close defence cooperation between the two countries under which China has become a major supplier of arms to Pakistan. China is currently building four new modern naval warships for Pakistan.

May in peril as Brexit offer slammed

AP ■ LONDON
British Prime Minister Theresa May was under pressure Wednesday to scrap a planned vote on her Brexit blueprint — and to resign — after her attempt at compromise got the thumbs-down from both her own Conservative Party and opposition lawmakers.

May plans to ask Parliament to vote next month on a bill implementing Britain's departure from the European Union.

Lawmakers have already rejected May's divorce deal with the EU three times, and Britain's long-scheduled departure date of March 29 passed with the country still in the 28-nation bloc.

In a last-ditch bid to secure support for her Brexit plan, May on Tuesday announced concessions including a promise to give Parliament a vote on whether to hold a new referendum on Britain's EU membership.

But opposition Labour Party lawmakers dismissed the offer as too little too late, and pro-Brexit Conservatives accused her of capitulating to pro-EU demands.

May faces a torrid session of criticism from all sides when she defends her Brexit deal in the House of Commons on Wednesday. Labour Brexit spokesman Keir Starmer said May should reconsider and



Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May delivers a speech in London as the British government is discussing how to tweak its proposed European Union divorce terms in a last-ditch attempt to get Parliament's backing for Prime Minister Theresa May's deal with the bloc

come back with a better offer that promised a "close economic relationship" with the EU and a new referendum.

"The prime minister needs to, today, accept that what she announced yesterday isn't going to work and pull the vote," Starmer told the BBC.

Conservative lawmakers, meanwhile, were due to meet

later Wednesday to discuss whether to attempt to topple May as party leader.

May has said she will announce a timetable for her departure once Parliament has voted on her Brexit bill. But with defeat of that bill looking likely, a growing number of Conservatives is pressing her to cancel the vote and quit even

sooner. Environment Secretary Michael Gove would not confirm that the bill would definitely be put to a vote the week of June 3, as May has promised. "We will reflect over the course of the next few days on how people look at the proposition that has been put forward," he said.

Boy or girl? Hong Kong at centre of banned China gender test

PTI ■ HONG KONG
Shady middle-men are openly advertising on Chinese social media to smuggle blood samples of pregnant women to Hong Kong to skirt the mainland's ban on gender testing, an AFP investigation has found.

The business thrives on a well-organised underground network that serves the huge demand for illicit sex-selective abortion in mainland China — driven by limits on family size and an entrenched cultural preference for sons.

Chinese authorities vowed to crack down on the trade in 2015.

But dozens of blood smuggling agents are openly advertising services on the Twitter-like platform Weibo and on websites, despite China's proven ability to scrub digital content.

Gender testing — except on medical grounds — is outlawed in China, where sex-selective abortions have helped create a surplus of about 31.6 million men, with some 115 boys born for every 100 girls last year.

A long-standing one-child policy was eased to permit two children in 2016 but gender testing continues, with many parents of daughters trying for a son the second time around.

Gender testing is legal in Hong Kong, with some clinics

apparently turning a blind eye to the origins of the smuggled samples.

Three agents contacted by an AFP reporter posing as a customer offered to arrange in-person appointments with medical testing labs or transport blood samples to Hong Kong for around USD 580, promising results starting from six weeks into pregnancy.

Upon payment of a deposit, the agent sends a testing kit to the client through a delivery service. One advised using an app to hire a nurse who could come to the patient's home in mainland China to extract blood.

The client sends the blood sample to Shenzhen from where it is smuggled across the border to Hong Kong. The agents did not directly address questions about how the samples would be transported, but assured the reporter they would arrive safely at their destination.

"They will be taken to the lab in a designated vehicle, the samples can be safely sent over for testing, nothing will go wrong," one representative said, adding that results would be sent out in one working day.

Other agents use human smugglers. In February, a 12-year-old girl headed to Hong Kong was caught at the Shenzhen border carrying 142 vials of blood samples from pregnant women in her back-

pack. The tests analyse small fragments of foetal DNA in a pregnant woman's blood and can detect the presence of a Y chromosome. They are also used to screen for chromosomal disorders such as Down's syndrome.

They can often accurately predict the gender of a foetus weeks before doctors can see the sex organs in an ultrasound. Some mainlanders take the legal option of travelling directly to Hong Kong for gender testing.

"I have three daughters already. To be honest I want a son," a 39-year-old man named Wang told AFP outside a lab in Kowloon where his wife was getting her blood tested.

Wang, who circumvented the one-child policy as many well-connected or wealthy Chinese families do, said he was under intense parental pressure to produce a male heir and had made the journey from the southern province of Guizhou.

"Chinese people still want to have a son to carry on the ancestral line, this is an antiquated way of thinking, but back home there are lots of people who think this way," he explained.

He added he and his wife would terminate the pregnancy in China if it turned out to be a girl.

Air China seeks compensation from Boeing for 737 Max delays

AP ■ BEIJING
Air China Ltd., one of China's three major state-owned airlines, is joining carriers that are asking Boeing Co. for compensation for the grounding of their 737 Max jetliners following two fatal crashes.

The carrier also has asked Boeing for compensation for disruptions due to delays in

delivery of new aircraft, an employee of Air China's publicity department said Wednesday. He declined to give his name or details of the claim. Air China, which has 15 737 Max planes, becomes the second Chinese carrier to ask Boeing for compensation following state-owned China Eastern Airlines Ltd. last month.

China was among the first

governments to order carriers to suspend use of the 737 Max in March following crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia that killed a total of 346 people.

China is, along with North America and Europe, one of the biggest global markets for jetliners. That the response of Chinese carriers and regulators to Boeing's problems critical for the company.

Investigators suggested a

flight-control system was to blame for both 737 Max crashes. Boeing says it is working on new software to get the planes back in the air.

Boeing estimates Chinese carriers will buy 7,700 jetliners over the next two decades.

The Chinese government alternates orders between Boeing and Airbus in order to maintain competition and hold down prices.

Omani writer wins Man Booker literature prize

AFF ■ LONDON

Jokha Alharthi has become the first Arabic author to win the Man Booker International prize for her novel "Celestial Bodies" which reveals her Omani homeland's post-colonial transformation.

"I am thrilled that a window has been opened to the rich Arabic culture," Alharthi, 40, told reporters after the ceremony at the Roundhouse in London on Tuesday.

Alharthi is the author of two previous collections of short fiction, a children's book and three novels in Arabic.

She studied classical Arabic poetry at Edinburgh University and teaches at

Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat.

"Oman inspired me but I think international readers can relate to the human values in the book - freedom and love," she said.

The prestigious 50,000-pound (USD 64,000) prize, which celebrates translated fiction from around the world, is divided equally between the author and the translator.

Alharthi's translator was US academic Marilyn Booth, who teaches Arabic literature at Oxford University.

The judges said Celestial Bodies was "a richly imagined, engaging and poetic insight into a society in transition and into lives previously



observed". It is set in the village of Al-

Awafi in Oman where we encounter three sisters: Mayya, who marries Abdallah after a heartbreak; Asma, who marries from a sense of duty; and Khawla, who is waiting for her beloved who has emigrated to Canada.

The three sisters witness Oman's evolution from a traditional, slave-owning society. "It touches the subject of slavery. I think literature is the best platform to have this dialogue," Alharthi said.

The jury said: "Elegantly structured and taut, it tells of Oman's coming-of-age through the prism of one family's losses and loves."

The Guardian said it offers "glimpses into a culture rela-

tively little known in the west" and The National said it signalled "the arrival of a major literary talent", calling the book "a densely woven, deeply imagined tour de force".

Jury chair Bettany Hughes said the novel showed "delicate artistry and disturbing aspects of our shared history".

"The style is a metaphor for the subject, subtly resisting clichés of race, slavery and gender," she said.

Alharthi was up against five other shortlisted authors: France's Annie Ernaux, Germany's Marion Poschmann, Poland's Olga Tokarczuk, Colombia's Juan Gabriel Vasquez and Chile's Alia Trabucco Zerán.

Judge orders Trump accounting firm to hand over records to Congress

“WE DISAGREE WITH THAT RULING, IT’S CRAZY,” PRESIDENT TELLS REPORTERS

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

An Indian-American judge has rejected President Donald Trump’s attempt to block House Democrats from getting his financial records, dealing an early setback to his administration in its legal battle with Congress.

Judge Amit Mehta of the DC District Court on Monday decisively ruled in favour of the House Oversight Committee, whose chair, Elijah Cummings had subpoenaed 10 years’ worth of Trump’s financial records from accounting firm Mazars USA back in April.

He told the accounting firm that it will need to turn over Trump’s accounting records from before he was president to the Democratic-controlled House Oversight Committee, CNN reported.

In a 41-page opinion, Mehta of the DC District Court dealt a significant blow to the White House as he rejected Trump’s attempt to block the committee’s subpoena, asserting that Congress is well within its authority to investigate the president.

Mehta’s ruling is narrow in that it only deals with the

House Oversight Committee’s Mazars subpoena. But it’s a key development in the larger, ongoing subpoena battle between Trump and Congress, because it gives Democrats legal ammunition when they go to court to enforce other outstanding subpoena requests.

The Trump administration recently issued a blanket denial of all Democrats’ subpoena requests, saying the information they seek is politically motivated. Democrats, on the other hand, say the administration’s actions amount to an unprecedented attempt to block Congress from its constitutionally mandated oversight. The House of Representatives has flagged the ruling to a judge in New York, where another court is considering challenges to House subpoenas to Deutsche Bank and Capitol One for more Trump records, CNN said.

Congress specifically can probe the president for conflicts of interest and ethical questions, Mehta wrote. He cited everything from the presidency of James Buchanan, to the Teapot Dome scandal, to Watergate and Whitewater to back up his ruling.

Mehta noted that in the past 50 years, Congress had twice investigated a sitting president for alleged criminal activity before starting impeachment proceedings — Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal, and Bill Clinton during the Whitewater scandal.

“History has shown that congressionally-exposed criminal conduct by the president or a high-ranking Executive Branch official can lead to legislation,” Mehta wrote.

“It is simply not fathomable that a Constitution that grants Congress the power to remove a president for reasons including criminal behavior would deny Congress the power to investigate him for unlawful conduct — past or present — even without formally opening an impeachment inquiry,” he added. Trump’s legal team plans to appeal, a person familiar with the case said Monday.

Mehta’s opinion, coming not even a week after a hearing in the case, will kickstart a race to appeals courts.

Mazars won’t have to turn over the subpoena for another seven days, according to the judge, but other courts will

have to step in to stop the accounting firm from complying with Congress after that.

The House Oversight Committee subpoena of Mazars seeks a vast amount of communications and financial records related to the firm’s work for Trump himself, as well as his businesses and foundation from 2011 through 2018.

Mazars became a target in the House investigation after former Trump personal attorney Michael Cohen accused the President of fudging his wealth in an unsuccessful attempt to buy the Buffalo Bills football team and reduce his real estate tax burden.

Cummings called the ruling a “resounding victory for the rule of law and our Constitutional system of checks and balances.” Trump immediately called the ruling “crazy.” “We disagree with that ruling, it’s crazy,” Trump told reporters, noting that Mehta was appointed by President Barack Obama.

“This never happened to any other president,” he added, saying that Democrats are trying to “get a redo” on the investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 election.

Duterte tightens grip on power in Philippine polls

AFP ■ MANILA

Allies of President Rodrigo Duterte stormed to a landslide victory in midterm polls, final results showed Wednesday, dissolving a last check on his controversial rule.

Loyalists won both houses of the legislature, shutting out all opposition candidates in the Senate, which had served as a buffer against Duterte’s most contentious plans.

The results open a path for Duterte — who has remarkably high approval ratings — to make good on his call to bring back the death penalty and advance his project to re-write the constitution.

“It’s a clear signal that the people will be behind him as he pushes bills and processes that went nowhere previously,” political analyst Ramon Casiple told AFP.

With nine Duterte backers and three nominally unaligned politicians taking the 12 seats at stake in the 24-member Senate, only four opposition members will remain, results from the elections authority showed.

Duterte allies kept control of the lower House of Representatives, which has approved legislation to bring back capital punishment and re-write the constitution since Duterte’s 2016 election.

Among the new senators is former national police chief Ronald dela Rosa, the first enforcer of Duterte’s narcotics crackdown that has killed over 5,300.

Campaigners say the true toll is at least triple that and may amount to crimes against humanity.

“Number one on my agenda is the reimposition of



In this file photo, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte (right) jokes to photographers as he holds an Israeli-made Galil rifle which was presented to him by former Philippine National Police Chief Director General Ronald dela Rosa at the turnover-of-command ceremony at the Camp Crame in Quezon city northeast of Manila. Elections officials were to proclaim the winners Wednesday, after finishing the official count of the May 13 elections overnight. President Duterte backed eight winning aspirants to half of the seats in the 24-member Senate, including his former national police chief, Dela Rosa, who enforced the president’s crackdown on illegal drugs in a campaign that left thousands of suspects dead and drew international condemnation. AP

the death penalty for drug trafficking,” dela Rosa told reporters.

“I will focus on that.” Senate seats also went to Christopher “Bong” Go, Duterte’s long-time advisor, and Imee Marcos, the daughter of deceased dictator Ferdinand Marcos, who was ousted in a 1986 popular uprising.

The top vote-getter in the Senate race, Cynthia Villar, thanked the president for his backing and asked for a round of applause for him in a speech after the results were announced.

“The laws we craft or legislate must consider all interests involved,” she added. “A strong and independent Senate has always been our goal.”

Opponents fear the majority will allow Duterte to

push forward his legislative agenda, which includes re-writing the constitution.

In addition to opening avenues for him to stay in power beyond his legally mandated single term that ends in 2022, a charter change could reshape the Philippines for decades.

Duterte has pitched constitutional reform to turn the Asian country into a decentralised federal republic where regions would have the power to fix local problems.

But the various initiatives launched in his first three years in office have also included proposals dropping term limits, allowing him to run for another term and weakening checks on presidential power.

“The pessimistic assessment is that what we’re looking towards is the complete transformation of the Philippine political system in the years to come, well beyond 2022 when Duterte’s term is supposed to end,” political analyst Richard Heydarian said.

The landslide victory was a crushing defeat for the opposition, leaving it mostly in disarray. “Voters were unable to relate to the issues highlighted by the opposition in the election, which was all about defeating Duterte,” Casiple said. The pro-Duterte electoral tsunami was also a win for the Duterte family.

Daughter Sara, touted as a possible 2022 presidential candidate, retained her post as mayor of the southern city of Davao, with sibling Sebastian winning as vice-mayor. The eldest son, Paolo, won a seat in the House of Representatives.

China blames US for sinking trade deal

AFP ■ WASHINGTON

China’s ambassador to the United States said in a Tuesday interview with Fox News that Washington repeatedly “changed its mind overnight” and sunk deals that could have ended the two countries’ trade war.

Ambassador Cui Tiankai also slammed as “politically motivated” the White House’s move to ban the transfer or sale of US technology to Chinese telcom giant Huawei.

“We are very worried. Such actions will really undermine people’s confidence in the normal function of the market,” Tiankai told Fox.

Washington has long suspected deep links between Huawei and the Chinese military, and its moves against the company came amid the churning trade dispute.

After a six month ceasefire, the standoff erupted anew on May 10 when the United States increased punitive

duties on \$200 billion in Chinese imports after talks in Washington collapsed.

Beijing followed suit three days later, saying it would raise tariffs on USD 60 billion in US exports starting on June 1.

In the interview, Tiankai said the administration of President Donald Trump was to blame for the failure to reach an agreement.

“If you review the process of trade talks between us over the last year or so, it’s

quite clear it is the US side that more than once changed its mind overnight and broke the tentative deal already reached,” Tiankai said.

“China remains ready to continue our talks with our American colleagues to reach a conclusion. Our door is still open,” he added.

US officials this week however issued a 90-day reprieve on the ban on dealing with Huawei, saying breathing space is needed to a avoid huge disruption.

N Korea state media hits out at ‘imbecile’ Biden

AFP ■ SEOUL

North Korean state media on Wednesday slammed former US vice president Joe Biden as an “imbecile” and a “fool of low IQ” after he criticised leader Kim Jong Un.

Biden, who served two terms as President Barack Obama’s deputy, has been on the campaign trail since announcing last month his candidacy for the Democratic Party nomination in the 2020 presidential election.

And some of his comments about the North Korean leadership during campaigning appear to have angered Pyongyang, sparking the colourful commentary by its official news agency KCNA.

It accused Biden of “slandering the supreme leadership” of North Korea — a term usually referring to leader Kim — and said the former senator had become “reckless and senseless, seized by ambition for power”.

“What he uttered is just sophism of an imbecile bereft of elementary quality as a human being, let alone a politi-



tionship with Kim.

While Biden has a gruelling primary campaign ahead against a packed bench of Democratic hopefuls, he is the current frontrunner and many in his party believe he is their best bet to oust Trump from the White House.

But infuriated by his comments, KCNA put together a laundry list of Biden’s past gaffes and humiliations. It went as far back as his university days, during which he once got an F for plagiarism, and later accusations that he had copied a speech by then British Labour party leader Neil Kinnock.

It also mentioned Biden falling asleep during an Obama speech in 2011, saying that it turned him into a “laughing stock”, and criticism of him “for his vulgar acts and words about women and his thoughtless remarks”.

Multiple women have accused Biden this year of touching them inappropriately in the past, and his tacitly style and invasion of personal space have come under increasing scrutiny in the #MeToo era.

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Air raids kill 12 civilians in Syrian town

AFP ■ BEIRUT

Air strikes by Damascus or its ally Moscow killed 12 civilians in a market in Syria’s Idlib province, a monitor said Wednesday, as fierce fighting raged for the jihadist-held northwestern region.

Another 18 people were wounded when the warplanes hit the jihadist-held town of Maarat al-Numan around midnight (2100 GMT) on Tuesday, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The market was crowded with people out and about after breaking the daytime fast observed by Muslims during the holy month of Ramadan.

The strikes came as heavy clashes raged in the north of neighbouring Hama province after the jihadists launched a counterattack on Tuesday against pro-government forces in the town of Kafr Nabuda.

Fresh fighting on Wednesday took the death toll to 52 — 29 troops and militia and 23 jihadists, the Observatory said.

Lanka Prez Sirisena extends emergency by a month

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena Wednesday extended by a month the state of emergency imposed in the wake of the deadly Easter Sunday bombings that killed nearly 260 people. The president issued a special gazette notification extending the state of emergency by a month, citing “public security”.

The emergency law gives police and the military extensive powers to arrest, detain and interrogate suspects without court orders.

Sri Lanka initially imposed the emergency on April 23 to crack down on the nine suicide bombers who attacked three churches and as many luxury hotels April 21, killing more than 258 people and injuring 500 others.

The ISIS terror group claimed the attacks, but the government blamed the local Islamist extremist group National Thawheed Jammath (NTJ) for the Ester Sunday bombings. Following the dead-

ly blasts, anti-Muslim riots broke out in the north of the capital as a backlash against the attacks. The riots killed one person and caused extensive damage to homes, businesses and mosques. Sri Lanka faced condemnation for the communal violence which was a fresh backlash from the Easter Sunday attack.

Police say they have arrested over 80 suspects in connection with the attack. AFP adds: Sri Lankan social networks saw a surge in fake news after the Easter suicide bombings a month ago despite an official social media blackout, highlighting the inability of governments to contain disinformation, experts said.

A nine-day ban on platforms including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and WhatsApp was introduced following the Islamic State-claimed attacks on churches and hotels on April 21 which killed 258 people and wounded nearly 500.

Many anxious social media users switched to virtual private networks (VPNs) or the TOR

network to bypass the order and keep communication open with friends and relatives as the extent of the carnage became clear.

But for others, the tools were a means to spread confusion and vitriol as the island struggled to come to terms with one of the worst terror attacks in its history.

Sanjana Hattotuwa, who monitors social media for fake news at the Centre for Policy Alternatives in Colombo, said the government blackout had failed to prevent “engagement, production, sharing and discussion of Facebook content”, and that he had seen a significant increase in false reports.

AFP has published half a dozen fact-checks debunking false claims made on Facebook and Twitter after the Easter attacks. Some had dug out photos of coffins and funerals from Sri Lanka’s brutal decades-long civil war and claimed they showed victims of the blasts.

One video posted to Facebook showed police arresting a man dressed in a burqa

and claimed he was involved in the bombings.

The video was actually from 2018, and showed a man who had used a burqa to hide his identity while he sought to attack someone over a debt issue. Another used a five-year-old photo from India that showed a group of men wearing T-shirts with “ISIS”, another name for Islamic State, written on them to claim there was an active IS cell in eastern Sri Lanka.

One Twitter user claiming to be a high-ranking Sri Lankan army brigadier used the platform to accuse neighbouring India of being involved in the attacks. The account was later taken down by Twitter after the Sri Lankan army complained. Authorities in Sri Lanka — where ethnic divisions still linger after decades of war — previously blocked Facebook in March 2018 after Buddhist hardliners used incendiary posts to fan religious violence that left three people dead and reduced several hundred homes and shops to ashes.

6 dead in Indonesia riots, govt restricts social media

AP ■ JAKARTA

Six people have died in election rioting in the Indonesian capital, authorities said Wednesday, as supporters of the losing presidential candidate burned vehicles and battled police and the government announced restrictions on social media.

The clashes began Tuesday night when supporters of former general Prabowo Subianto tried to force their way into the downtown offices of the election supervisory agency and have continued unabated since then. More than two dozen vehicles were burned as rioters took over neighborhoods in central Jakarta, throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails at police who responded with tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets.

Subianto, a volatile ultra-nationalist politician, has refused to accept the official results of the April 17 election and instead declared himself the winner. The Election Commission on Tuesday said President Joko Widodo, the first Indonesian president from outside the Jakarta elite, had won 55.5 per cent of the vote, securing the moderate technocrat a second term. Subianto, an elite figure from a wealthy family connected to former dictator Suharto, also lost to Widodo in 2014. He has made four unsuccessful bids for the presidency since Suharto was ousted in 1998.

Rudiantara, the communications and information technology minister, said features of social media including Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp will be restricted on a temporary basis to prevent the spread of hoaxes and

inflammatory content. He said messaging systems will still work for text and voice messages but photos and videos will be blocked or slowed.

National police chief Tito Karnavian said the people who died in the rioting were hit by gunshots or blunt devices. Authorities are still investigating the death causes and are not ruling out the involvement of third parties acting as provocateurs.

“There are attempts to create martyrs, blaming security officials for building public anger,” he said.

The rioting in Jakarta was planned and not spontaneous, according to police. Officers found an ambulance filled with stones and some of the dozens of people arrested had envelopes of money, said national police spokesman Muhammad

Iqbal. Many of those arrested and come from outside Jakarta, he said.

The government had deployed some 50,000 police and soldiers in Jakarta in anticipation of protests following the official election results. Many residents have left the city and parts of the downtown are closed to traffic with the election supervisory agency and Election Commission barricaded with razor wire.

In the past week, authorities have arrested three pro-Subianto activists on suspicion of treason. They included Sunarko, a retired general and former commander of Indonesia’s special forces who uses a single name. Police allege there was a plot to seize crucial government buildings in Jakarta.

Subianto’s campaign plans to challenge the election in the

Constitutional Court. They allege massive fraud in the world’s third-largest democracy but have provided no credible evidence.

The former special forces general and members of his campaign team had said they would mobilize “people power” during days of street protests. The former general has also called on supporters to refrain from violence.

Subianto ran a fear-based campaign, emphasizing what he sees as Indonesia’s weakness and the risk of exploitation by foreign powers or disintegration. He aligned himself with hard-line Muslim groups and won massive majorities in conservative provinces such as Aceh, which follows Shariah law, but was defeated by Widodo in the president’s populous East Java and Central Java strongholds.



Indonesian police arrest a supporter of the losing presidential candidate in Jakarta on Wednesday. Supporters of the losing presidential candidate burned vehicles and battled police and the government announced restrictions on social media. AP

EXPLORE SUNNY SIDE OF LIFE

A holiday in the Maldives not only provides the ultimate in perfect relaxation, it also introduces guests to the essence of pure nature says, ANKITA SAXENA

The Maldives, an island nation in the Indian Ocean, is none less than a dreamy holiday destination. With 99 percent of sea and just one percent land, this country is an amalgamation of over 1,190 coral islands ringed by a beautiful landscape of reefs, which makes it the most dispersed country in the world. Its unique geography and breath-taking natural beauty has made the destination one of the most sought-after holiday destinations in the world. To decide to have a holiday in the Maldives is to choose not just the perfect destination for a vacation, but also to discover the sunny side of life.



MELTING POT OF CULTURE

From local cuisine to music, the culture of Maldives reflects a rich blend of the many cultural aspects, introduced by seafarers who settled in the country in the ancient times. Enjoy the local cuisine which reflects use of spicy curries and coconut milk and fish as the main staples and either white rice or Koshi (a thin variant of Indian flatbread) as a popular accompaniment. However, those who want to try something familiar there is a range of world cuisine available. Sway to the music played with the local Boduberu (big drum) and dance to the amalgamation of songs from various countries to truly indulge in the Maldivian spirit.

EXPERIENTIAL STAY

Maldives offers accommodations to suit every pocket, where you can choose from a guesthouse, hotel, resort or a

liveboard. The stay itself is an experience in this island country. Of the 1,190 islands, more than 120 have been developed as resorts and are in operation, and at least another 50 are under development.

Since Maldives is popularly known for a 'one-island-one-resort' concept, each of the registered tourist resorts is on its own uninhabited island with superlative architect-designed accommodation, either in beachside rooms or overwater villas. When staying in overwater villas, be mesmerised with the opulence and exclusivity but don't miss out to climb down from the room into the ocean at any time—to call a part of the ocean your own.

SATISFY THE ADRENALINE RUSH

The Maldives are the white-sand, palm-fringed castaway islands of your imagination. The water is so clear

you can see the brightly colored fish from your lounge. Dive, snorkel, sail or simply sit back and soak it all in.

If you want the adrenaline of adventure sports, the Maldives has it all. From skimming the Indian Ocean waters on a jet-ski to parasailing, kayaking and surfing, Maldives is the ideal destination for an active beach holiday. Water based activities like canoeing, banana ride, water scooters and parasailing are just some of them. The Maldives underwater offers you a chance to experience bliss like never before as the sun's rays illuminate the crystal clear waters. Diving and snorkeling are not to be missed when in this country. Most holiday resorts and hotels in Maldives have dive centers with professional guides, instructors or marine biologists who offer different types of diving and snorkeling excursions.

ACTIVITIES GALORE

There is no complete description of the boundless beauties of the Maldivian islands and its vibrant and multicolored waters. Although the appeal of these isles is their isolation, there is plenty to do and you can choose to be as active as you wish.

A holiday to the Maldives is incomplete without a dolphin watching trip as this destination is one of the best places on the planet to experience these creatures up close. Many resorts and hotels in Maldives offer dolphin watching excursions to popular sites every day. Get a chance to get particularly close to dolphins, and you may even get to swim with them!

Cruising on a traditional dhoni, which is one of the oldest sea vessels in Maldives, is the best local experience. It is a good idea to experience fishing where you would be able to catch tuna, emperors, snappers, squirrelfish, jacks and other reef fish.



Jammu pitches Buddhist trail

As an initiative to apprise people about the rich heritage and culture of the Jammu region, the Directorate of Tourism, Jammu organised a heritage walk from Jio Potha Ghat at Akhnoor to Ambaran, which is locally known as 'Pambaran'. Over 200 people gathered for this walk which was flagged off by Om Prakash Bhagat, KAS, Director of Tourism, Jammu in the presence of Ansuya Jamwal (KAS), Deputy Director Tourism, Jammu, Gopal Singh (KAS), SDM Akhnoor and Deepesh Singh, Chairman Municipal Committee Akhnoor. The importance of Ambaran lies in the fact that it is the earliest recorded Buddhist site in the entire region of Jammu and has been visited by his holiness, the Dalai Lama in 2011.

The bank of River Chenab where under a tree the coronation of Raja Gulab Singh was performed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh on June 17 in 1822. During the walk, participants were made aware about the historical and cultural importance of monuments like Jio Potha Temple and other landmark monuments like Pandav Gufa, Gurudwara Tapo Asthan Sant Baba Sunder Singh Ji Ali Begh and the Parshuram Temple.

The historic details about the site were explained by Jai Karan Singh, assistant archaeologist from the Archaeology Survey of India Srinagar Circle. The discovery of this important site was due to excavations by Srinagar circle of Archeological Survey of India which revealed, Ambaran's Buddhist history as a monastery which was active

for about 900 years between 2nd Century BC and 7th Century AD, a period belonging to the pre Kushana, Kushana, post Kushana and post Gupta eras.

Director Tourism, while addressing the gathering said that the Department is making every effort to promote the state's historical places which have tourism potential. Besides this in view of upcoming Amarnath Yatra would target to divert people to local Jammu destinations.

Other officers who joined the heritage walk were Sheena Sahni (KAS), Assistant Director Tourism Jammu, Ambika Bali, Assistant Director Tourism NHW Batote and Surinder Kumar Bhat, Conservation Assistant Archaeological Survey of India Srinagar Circle Jammu.

BHARTI AXA LIFE INSURANCE WINS FICCI CLAIMS EXCELLENCE

Bharti AXA Life Insurance has been conferred with the 'Claims Excellence Award' by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) for its customer-friendly claims services, including dedicated claims handler and one of the best claim settlement ratios, in the life insurance sector during its 20th Annual Insurance Conference—FINCON 2019. "This award is a recognition of our pledge to provide protection against the uncertainties of life and timely support to customers and their families in every possible manner in the hour of need. We have successfully maintained an improved and robust track record in claims settlement in the past few years. We continue to enable faster claims settlement as our prime responsibility," said the managing director and chief executive officer of the company, Vikas Seth.



Ease of claims process related initiatives, effective claims settlement turn-around-time from intimation to dis-

bursement and improved claim settlement ratio were the differentiators that led to Bharti AXA Life Insurance winning the distinguished accolade.

Commenting on the feat at the first FICCI Insurance Industry Awards 2019, the chief operative officer of the company, Ishita Mukherjee, said, "We are happy to receive this award which is a testimony to the trust reposed in the company and its products and services by customers, other stakeholders and the industry. Our tech-driven customer services initiatives with a human touch ensured customised and

faster solutions and helped us improve claims settlement ratio gradually. We are committed to further raise our customer services bar." Bharti AXA Life Insurance improved its individual claim settlement ratio, the number of claims paid to the number of claims received, to 96.85 per cent in the financial year 2017-18. As many as 30 insurance companies participated in the FICCI Insurance Industry Award, which recognises efficacy, excellence and contribution of both life and non-life insurance companies in the domestic insurance landscape.

LIC deliberates on corporate strategies



LIC of India's 59th All India Senior Divisional Managers' Conference was held in Mumbai recently wherein the annual corporate strategies were deliberated upon. The divisional heads, representing 113 Divisions all across the country, zonal heads from eight different Zones as well as all operational heads in the rank of Executive Directors from Corporate Office participated in deliberations for finalising strategies on various aspects of marketing, customer service,

information technology, HR, international operations and new initiatives for the current financial year.

LIC has registered a market share of 74.71 per cent in number of Policies and 66.24 per cent in the First Year Premium Income for the year 2018-19 and achieved the highest ever First Year Premium Income of ₹1,42,191.69 crore. The performance in settlement of claims continues to be a matter of pride for the Corporation. The top achievers of 2018-

2019 were felicitated during the conference. Panel discussions, brainstorming on corporate strategies for the objectives of the current financial year and planning of activities towards execution of the same, formed the agenda of the gathering. The managing director and chief executive officer of IDBI Bank, Rakesh Sharma, was the guest speaker at the event where he shared his vision on the Bank's association with LIC of India and the synergies that can happen between LIC offices and IDBI Bank outlets.

IDBI Bank tied up with LIC of India as Corporate Agent in February, 2019 and in the first month i.e. March, 2019 they have procured 20,980 Policies with Premium of ₹139.70 crore. In the current year i.e. 2019-2020, till date, they have completed New Business of 1929 Policies and Premium of ₹30.21 crore and are occupying the top rank among all Bancassurance partners of LIC of India.

SUSHMITA SINGH CROWNED FIRST MISS TEEN INDIA



The Indian national director of Miss Teen World 2019 crowned Sushmita Singh (18), from Kalyan, Mumbai, the first ever Miss Teen India World while Samragyi Bansal and Pritika Pahwa took home the 1st and 2nd Runner-up titles respectively at a glittering ceremony at the Flying Dutchman, Logix City Centre, Noida.

Sushmita, an aspiring student of mass media, will now represent India in El Salvador, Central America, in one of the world's top three biggest international beauty contest for teenagers—Miss Teen World (Mundial) by Francisco Cortez, who is a maker of national and international beauty queens for the last 35 years. Jasmeet Kaur believes India is emerging as a strong force in the teen category of beauty pageants and is positive that Sushmita will make the nation proud.



The chairman of National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) N N Sinha, signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the vice president of Korea Expressway Corporation K H Lee, at Seoul in order to cooperate further in road and transport infrastructure development projects of India. This cooperation aims to promote technical and institutional knowledge exchange in the field of road and transport between India and Korea.

NMDC ESTABLISHES A GLOBAL DEPARTMENT

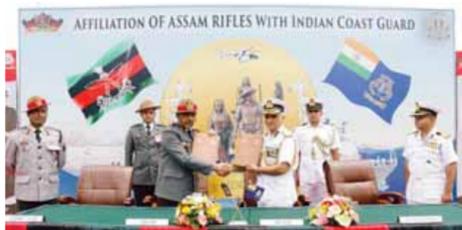
NMDC while maintaining its leadership position in the Indian iron ore industry is also focussing on increasing its geographic foothold globally. NMDC currently has presence in Australia, Mozambique and Tanzania and is also looking

to diversify into strategic and critical raw materials and also the other emerging opportunities in key minerals which has potential to deliver the long term benefits to the company and the country.

To give a structured

thrust on the above areas, NMDC has created a separate department—"NMDC Global" to pursue those international opportunities for acquisition of mineral assets and strategic tie ups regarding emerging technologies.

ASSAM RIFLES AFFILIATES WITH INDIAN COAST GUARD



Assam Rifles, the oldest paramilitary force and the Indian Coast Guard, the youngest Armed Force, have signed a 'Charter of Affiliation' at the Directorate General Assam Rifles (DGAR) Headquarters at Laitkor, Shillong. Both the forces are Border Guarding Forces; one guards the coastal frontiers while the other guards the Indo-Myanmar border. The affiliation has been carried out between the 3rd (Naga Hills) Battalion of the Assam Rifles and the Indian Coast Guard ship—'Shaurya'.

This initiative will facilitate greater understanding of operational ethos, sharing of best practices from each other, building camaraderie and utilisation of each other's assets

for operations, training and sports and adventure will be carried out. The signing of the 'Charter of Affiliation' was proceeded by a joint wreath laying ceremony at the Assam Rifles War Memorial and a combined 'Guard of Honour' led by Capt Ruchi Pathak of Assam Rifles.

The event was attended by Lt Gen Sukhdeep Sangwan, SM, Director General Assam Rifles and Director General Rajendra Singh, PTM, TM, Indian Coast Guard along with host of officers and men from both the Forces. Both the Director Generals expressed their gratitude to the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Defence for clearing the routes for this historic affiliation.



IMS to empower rural India with IT education

Institute of Management Studies (IMS) Ghaziabad, a 29-year-old flagship institute of the IMS Society Ghaziabad, and the CSC Academy, a society established by the CSC e-Governance Services India Ltd (CSC SPV), have announced a strategic alliance to develop and deliver short term IT courses to students living in rural areas of India.

As part of this alliance, IMS Ghaziabad and CSC Academy will work together for short term courses which would ideally be suited to students in the rural areas of the country. IMS Ghaziabad and CSC Academy would work jointly to identify need-based courses and their delivery by CSCs in the rural heartland. These courses will contribute to the various sectors such as financial inclusion, education, healthcare and liveli-

hood generation which will help in enriching the quality of life in rural India.

The director of IMS Ghaziabad, Prof Alok Pandey, said "As a leading provider of management and IT education, we are delighted to extend our involvement with CSC Academy to empower students in rural areas. With this alliance, we will unlock new opportunities and bring additional value to student's community."

The secretary of CSC Academy, Dr Dinesh Tyagi, said "Working in rural areas, this partnership will create and deliver short term courses in IT to vast majority of students who are deprived of quality infrastructure and lab facilities. The courses would run on intelligent LMS with remote proctored exams."

Chittaranjan Locomotive Works observes Anti-Terrorism Day



An annual feature, the Anti Terrorism Day was observed in Chittaranjan Locomotive Works at the Administrative Office in West Bengal recently, to uphold and promote peace, social harmony and understanding among all fellow human beings and fight the forces of disruption threatening human lives and values. The principal head of the departments, senior officers, staff council members and employees present on the occasion followed the Anti Terrorism pledge as read out by the principal chief electrical engineer, Ram Prakash.

Newly constructed Khatauli-Muzaffarnagar doubled rail section tested

Working towards the commitment to strengthen its infrastructure, the Northern Railway has added another feather in its cap in the form of a 22km long doubling of section from Khatauli to Muzaffarnagar in connection with the Meerut City-Muzaffarnagar rail line doubling on Ghaziabad-Saharanpur section of Delhi Division.

The Commissioner Railway Safety (Northern Circle) SK Pathak, conducted an intensive inspection and speed trial on the section. The trial train was successful-

ly run at 120 km/hr, clocking upto 140 km/hr. The CRS has expressed satisfaction on the construction quality of the doubled line. Consent for regular train operations on the newly constructed portion with running speed upto 110 km/hr has been granted to Northern Railway.

The completion of the doubling work and regular train services on the section will facilitate smooth and timely operations of passenger and goods trains providing better opportunities to the people of the sugar producing region of the country.



J&K's first ever peaceful elections since 1990

A delegation of the German Embassy led by Second Secretary on Political Affairs and Protocol, Bastian Weber, along with the German Embassy Political Advisor, Sakshi Arora, called upon Jammu and Kashmir KVIB vice chairperson, Dr Hina Shafi Bhat, to get the first hand review of the security and political situation in the Kashmir valley.

Bhat informed the delegation that this is for the first time in the history of J&K that the state witnessed peaceful and casualty free parliament elections since 1990. "The change in the socio-political scenario of the state is evident from the fact that all the political parties participated in the election," said Bhat and credited the peaceful atmosphere to the Governor of J&K. She stated that the state has witnessed vigorous development under the Governor's rule, which was otherwise ceased. "Education, sports and infrastructure remained the thrust areas during the present dispensation," said Bhat, adding that the people of the state, especially the Kashmir region, are happy with the working of the Governor. On assembly elections in the state, she informed

that the Election Commission of India has to take the final call, but it would be based on the situation in J&K.

"All these years, elections in J&K were carried by exploiting aspirations of the common people. Mainstream political parties in connivance with separatists were habitual of fooling people, but we want clean elections to keep democracy alive," said she and further commented that under the BJP party, all the three regions of the state received equitable treatment.

While deliberating on presence of BJP in Kashmir, Bhat commented that the way things are changing at ground level, it goes on to show that BJP is being liked by the right minded and progressive people. "BJP is now a recognised party in the Kashmir valley, with more than two lakh members. People are showing faith in the policies of the Prime Minister and they have high expectations from him with regards to the solution of Kashmir imbroglio." She also expressed her opinion to say that the opposition parties have now resorted to create apprehensions about abrogation of Article 370 and 35 A, as they do not find any substantial ground to criticise the BJP.

Trend Glazer

Ajay's throwback with Tabu

Actor **AJAY DEVGN** took a dig at his *De De Pyaar De* co-star **Tabu** with a throwback image of the two from the film *Vijaypath* (1994).

The actor posted the image on social media, in which he can be seen sleeping with his mouth wide open while Tabu is sitting beside him, looking completely disinterested. He captioned it: "Still haven't figured, if the reason to fall asleep was the puzzle or Tabu."

The two are in costume for the song *Aayiye aapka intezaar tha*.



'I am really proud of all the films that I have done. I learnt something new about acting. Box office collection is not in my hands, but I am grateful. With the online platform, a film never dies. Though Pataalkha didn't do well at the box office, it really worked online. But in future, I have to be careful. I want to be a bankable actor.'

—Sanya Malhotra

Actress **KARISMA KAPOOR** says she chose not to do full-fledged roles in films for a while as she wanted to be at home with her children. But now the *Dil To Pagal Hai* star is back in the saddle in a different avatar and on a new platform.

Did she get nervous acting in front of the camera after a gap? Karisma said, "Acting is ingrained in a person. It is something that never goes away. I was waiting for something really interesting. It was out of my choice that I didn't do any film because my kids were very young."



O'Shea is a huge fan of Godzilla

Actor **O'SHEA JACKSON JR** or **OMG**, is set to take on the big screen as a member of the military in the cast of *Godzilla II: King of the Monsters*. The actor is a huge fan of the monster.

"I was nerding out really hard," he said. "You don't have anything else terrorising cities like Godzilla does. He is dominating and destroying, but he saves too. I always disliked those who acted like Godzilla didn't just save them. This'll be the first Godzilla film where I actually care about the humans."

Directed by **Michael Dougherty**, the film follows the heroic efforts of the crypto-zoological agency, Monarch as its members face off against god-sized monsters like the mighty Godzilla, who collides with Mothra, Rodan, and the three-headed Ghidorah.



REAL MEN & THEIR MISSION

Director **RAJ KUMAR GUPTA's** latest, *India's Most Wanted*, like his past outings, draws inspiration from an actual operation to capture a terrorist, says **SAIMI SATTAR**

Dressed in a white shirt, blue jeans and black rimmed glasses, Raj Kumar Gupta could pass off as just any man in the crowd. Not many might take a second look at him as there is an inherent ordinariness in his demeanour and attire. And it is this quality that has been imbued in the characters that people his newest film, *India's Most Wanted*, which stars Arjun Kapoor alongside four newcomers.

The film is based on the real story of five RAW agents who pool in their money and go out and capture one of India's most wanted terrorists and that too without firing a weapon. The trailers have been garnering eyeballs and the men who are a part of it have an everyday ordinariness, which is in sharp contrast to the beefy protagonists that one usually sees in Hindi action films. The director, whose debut film *Aamir* (2008) still sets the benchmark in realistic cinema, says, "Being well built is not proportionate to bravery. People who are physically strong might not rise to the occasion. It is about mental courage, tact and trade craft. I met a lot of people who work in RAW and they look like very real people."

He points out that for any intelligence operations officer, the ability to blend in with the surroundings is essential. "They were regular men. They might have been walking here and doing regular jobs and you wouldn't be aware that these are the people who protect us by risking their lives," he says. Reflecting on their sacrifices, he felt a compulsion to celebrate these unsung heroes for a reason. "What do they get in return for their services? They stay away from their family for so long. They do not even expect gratitude and rather see it as their duty. This made the story very humane and personal," says he.

Gupta remembers that the story came to his attention when he read something in the newspapers and decided to pursue it further. "I started meeting people and reading about the incident which got me more and more interested. There was a lot of layering. You feel that these people, who go on a mission, would have weapons and government support but my research revealed something to the contrary," he says.

Like *No One Killed Jessica* (2011) and *Raid* (2018), his other films, this, too, is rooted in reality. Gupta prefers to stick to this genre and even the manner of approaching a film, for a reason. He says, "It is something that breathes life into



storytelling. People are emotionally more connected with stories that they hear or read or when something comes out of reality. It gives you a sense of belonging or a connection. For us, filmmakers, it is important that when we hear a story, it should touch us intellectually or emotionally."

When *Aamir*, his first film was released, which too was based on terrorism, the socio-political climate in the country was very different as was the way people reacted to acts of terror. "The tragedy and emotion remain the same. When an act like this occurs, people suffer as innocent lives are lost. There is a human and an emotional cost. That remains the same even now. However, the consumption of how we see information and how we conceive it, has changed because of social media and fake news. Whether these are responsibly consumed or not depends on the individual and his/her understanding of right and wrong. Maybe one doesn't handle

responsibly and that is the real change that we are witnessing. People receive a message in a WhatsApp group and start believing it. A restrained reaction is essential rather than a knee-jerk one," he says.

In the current context, Gupta also points out that love for a country does not mean proclaiming it from rooftops or hyper nationalism. "One would always have love for one's country and motherland, for that is inherently why one lives here. It doesn't mean that one starts shouting that 'I am a nationalist and love my country'. However, in a certain kind of situation you might end up saying it. In the film, people, who are working for the country and serving it because they love it, do say so. This is done in context and has to be seen within it. There is more to nationalism than the hyper variety that we see on social media," he says.

The film stars Arjun Kapoor whose last outing, *Namaste England*



(2018), did not fare too well at the box office. Considering that the film making business often works on the saleability of a star, did Gupta consider any other actor, maybe Ajay Devgn, who was the lead in *Raid*, for the role? "I never thought in the manner of hits of an actor. It took me three years to complete the script as I was also doing *Raid*. When that released, Arjun called to congratulate me on its success and this just happened instinctively. I was looking for a very normal kind of character who could mingle with the crowd and blend in without being noticed. I instinctively offered him the script and he loved it. And that's how we came together," explains he.

As in the past, this time too Gupta has shot at live locations. He says, "The nature was such that it had to be shot in real locations in Patna and Nepal. It was because the reality that I wanted to portray would not come through otherwise."

However, shooting outside studios can be a logistical nightmare as there are incessant crowds and the fact that things cannot be controlled. Gupta agrees, "It is quite challenging to do a film like this. While shooting in real locations, nothing is in your control so you try to do your best in the given scenario. It is undoubtedly difficult, but if one is passionate one just does it. In a studio, I wouldn't have been able to achieve the same flavour or reality."

Even the elements of humour in his film come from real life situations that Indians can relate to. There is a particular sequence in the trailer where one character complains that more money is spent on floral showers during Republic Day than on an intelligence mission, which makes one laugh. "I don't write for the sake of writing. It is written to identify and strike a chord by drawing it from reality," he says.

Gupta has written the script of all his films, including *Ghanchakkar* (2013), though not *Raid*. How does

he wear the two hats and balance them? "When you are writing a script, you are not thinking of direction. Writing is a very isolating and different process. It takes time and is done within four walls so, it is a little painful and excruciating. But once I finish, I let the director in me take over."

With *India's Most Wanted*, he has also turned producer which means an additional responsibility. However, he has found a way to balance that by handing it out. "My partner helped in the production and so did the team. I concentrate on the writing and direction but what does happen when you turn producer is that you start seeing things in a different perspective. But I leave it to my partner," he reiterates. He got married last year to his long time partner, Myra Karn.

Gupta is currently working on a script of a film on Ravinder Kaushik, India's foremost spy, who was conferred the title of 'The Black Tiger' for his service to the nation. He has acquired the rights to Ravinder's story from his family. "It will take time and I don't know when I will finish it," he says.

Gupta, who hails from Hazaribagh, got interested in writing during his graduation days at the University of Delhi. "I was interested in creative writing and made my way to Mumbai. The move to direction happened organically. I became an assistant director and later an associate director. I kept writing for three, four or maybe five years. *Aamir* was the fifth script that I wrote. The others are still lying with me but I have no intention of putting them on screen as they are not good enough," he says.

Of course, an outsider coming to Mumbai entailed a certain amount of struggle especially given the fact that the industry often works within cliques and coterie. "One goes through a struggle in every field, especially when you are in a city where you don't know your way around and you should take in stride. But I don't wish to elaborate on it," he says.

Talking about the influences on his craft, he says, "I am not influenced by anyone. Reality and the way I see things differently have shaped me more than any other person. I take a situation and think about it which influences my filmmaking."

Clearly, while he might not be influenced, but given his filmography, the soft-spoken director is bound to influence a generation of filmmakers to come.

(The film releases on May 24.)
Photo: Pankaj Kumar



A MEETING WITH COPS

Actress **RANI MUKERJI** met the top female cop of Rajasthan during the shoot of *Mardaani 2*

Actress **Rani Mukerji**, who is currently in Rajasthan shooting for her next, *Mardaani 2*, was invited to meet the Kota police force and their families at an informal gathering. Rani, who plays the role of a top cop in Rajasthan, was extremely delighted to meet the top female cop of the city, Dr Amrita Duhan, the assistant superintendent of police.

"About 300 police officers and their families met Rani and had a great time interacting with each other," said a source.

"She spent about an hour with the gathering and thanked the Kota police for their incredible support during the filming of *Mardaani 2* and also said that the film will make every police officer in Rajasthan, as well as India, proud. She dedicated the film to all the women police officers of the country who work tirelessly and courageously to safeguard law and order in society and protect the innocent. Rani was overwhelmed with the warm response of the cops and their families towards her," the source added.

Produced by Aditya Chopra, the film will be Rani's next release after the global hit *Hichki*. The film marks the directorial debut of Gopi Puthran.

CANNES DIARIES

When three legends meet

With actors **LEONARDO DICAPRIO** and **BRAD PITT** by his side, filmmaker **QUENTIN TARANTINO** made a fairytale debut at the festival

Twenty-five years after premiering *Pulp Fiction* in Cannes, Quentin Tarantino returned to the French film festival with neither great vengeance nor furious anger but a gentler fairy tale about 1960s Los Angeles.

Once Upon a Time In ... Hollywood made its much-anticipated debut in the festival, giving the festival its most concentrated splash of celebrity and frenzy. The film's two stars, Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio, brought a fittingly old-school Hollywood glamour to the red carpet, where throngs of onlookers swelled along the Croisette.

Much of the plot of *Once Upon a Time In ... Hollywood* had been carefully kept under wraps leading up to the premiere. DiCaprio plays a Westerns actor anxious that his notoriety is slipping. Pitt plays his stunt double, friend and, because of a drunk driving offence, his driver. Though set against the backdrop of the Manson Family murders, much of Tarantino's film is invested in recapturing the radiance of a bygone Hollywood.

For a filmmaker often associated with blistering dialogue and ecstatic explosions of violence, *Once Upon a Time In ... Hollywood* finds the 56-year-old Tarantino working at a more relaxed pace, spending generous amounts of time in odes to spaghetti Westerns and '60s TV shows.

Ahead of the premiere, Tarantino, whose *Pulp Fiction* won the Palme d'Or in 1994, issued a statement to the festival audience imploring them not to spoil the film for future moviegoers — a request repeated before the film's press screening. Journalists lined up hours in advance.



The film is Tarantino's first, which is not being released by Harvey Weinstein. After Tarantino cut ties with the disgraced mogul, the project attracted the interest of most studios. Sony Pictures landed the film and gave it a \$95 million budget — a very rare gamble on a high-priced original movie.

Instead of superheroes or intellectual property, *Once Upon a Time In ... Hollywood* will instead bank on the draw of Tarantino and his two film stars. Margot Robbie also co-stars as Sharon Tate. The film releases in US theaters on July 26.

Speaking about the film with, DiCaprio recalled one of the "most ominous and sad" experiences he has had in the entertainment industry. The actor was one of the last people in Hollywood to see actor River Phoenix alive. "I grew up revering River Phoenix as the great actor of my generation. I wanted an opportunity to shake his hand. And

The two stars brought a fittingly old-school Hollywood glamour to the red carpet, where throngs of onlookers swelled along the Croisette

one night, at a party in Silver Lake, I saw him. It was almost like something you would see in *Vertigo*, because I saw there was something in his face, and I'd always wanted to meet him, and as he was walking towards me, I kind of froze.

"Then the crowd got in my way, and I looked back and he was gone," DiCaprio said. "It was an existential thing where I felt like, he disappeared in front of my very eyes, and 'the tragedy that I felt afterward of having lost this great influence for me and all of my friends,' he continued.

"The actor we all talked about. Just to be able to have that, and I remember extending my hand out... And then two people came in front and when I looked back, he wasn't there."

—Agencies

SONAM'S ETHEREAL LOOK

Whenver Sonam Kapoor Ahuja steps out on the red carpet, she practically slays it. The clotheshorse that the lady is, she makes one look forward to each of her outings, this time at Cannes.

Beginning from a monochrome and dramatic red, the actress slayed her debut at the festival through her five different avatars. Her red dress with furr-like sleeves was followed by a navy blue gown and then a white-golden strapless dress that brought a pinch of Indianness to her diva look, which was designed by Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla.

Spreading the sunshine, the actress



chose a bright yellow number during the unveiling of the Chopard Garden of The Kings. The dress came with a broad off-shoulder neckline, ruffle details and a voluminous skirt which gave the outfit a dramatic touch. Her look was a testimony to her ever-glamorous fashion statements.

For the red carpet appearance, Sonam dressed in an all-white ethereal look, designed by Ralph and Russo. The actress channelled the vibes of a fierce boss lady in her tuxedo, which featured a glorious plunging neckline and had a gown-like entourage. Her ensemble was paired with emerald jewellery by Chopard and white court shoes by Jimmy Choo.



SHIVA, PANGHAL LEAD HOME DOMINATION

Indians pugilists rule the roost in 52kg category as all four Indians secure semifinal berth

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

It was a spectacular homecoming for World championship Bronze medallist Shiva Thapa, while Asian Games Gold medallist Amit Panghal also lived upto his billing reaching the semifinals in 52kg category at the second India Open boxing tournament here on Wednesday.

Five other Indians also progressed to the semifinals at the Karmabir Nabin Chandra Bordoloi Indoor Stadium.

Three years after he was crowned national champion at the same venue, a matured Thapa returned stronger as he clinically executed his plans to outwork his taller Mauritius opponent Hellene Damien 5-0 and set up a semifinal clash against D Krystian Szczepanski of Poland in the 60kg category.

"I was facing a taller opponent like him for the first time in my category," said Thapa, who will switch to 63kg after the tournament keeping in mind of the approved weight categories for Olympic qualification.

"He had a better reach so my strategy was to hit him from the close range and then quickly go out of his reach. It worked out perfectly."

All the buzz of the day was about the 13th bout of the day as hordes of school children, Shiva's family members including his father Padam Thapa waited anxiously for the local favourite to come inside the ring.



"I can't express in words the amazing feeling. The crowd was all at their toes and it was about living up to their expectation," said Thapa, who last month became the first Indian male boxer to claim four consecutive Asian medals with his Bronze at the Asian Championship in Bangkok.

Ankit and Manish Kaushik also had 5-0 wins over their respective opponents making it a three-Indian lineup in the 60kg category.

In the 52kg category, Indians ruled the roost with Panghal, national champion P L Prasad, former world youth champion Sachin Siwach and reigning Commonwealth Games champion Gaurav Solanki making it an all-Indian lineup.

Panghal, who claimed the 49kg gold after defeating reigning Olympic champion Hasanboy Dusmatov of Uzbekistan in the Asiad final in Jakarta last year, opted to play a waiting game against Thailand Chakapong Chanpirom in the first round.

Having moved up to Olympic category 52kg after winning Gold at the Strandja meet in Bulgaria earlier this year, Panghal then stepped up his pace to win 5-0.

"It took sometime for me to assess him and get a grip of his style of play but I'm happy that it paid off," Panghal said.

"It's a tough category. Many new boxers will come in to meet the Olympic qualification standard. I

have to watch both," Panghal, who had clinched a Gold in his new weight category in the Asian championship beating Dusmatov again, added.

Panghal will take on reigning national champion Prasad in the semifinal, while the other half will see Siwach face-off against Bidhuri. Fresh from a Bronze at the GeeBee Boxing tournament Finland, Siwach did his homework well to exact revenge on world championship Bronze medalist Rogen Ladon of Philippines.

The two-time former Olympian had defeated Siwach by a split-decision in the President's Cup quarter-finals in Astana last year.

Siwach rectified his mistake and waited to capitalise on the Filipino's mistakes to go for the kill as he won 4-1 via split decision.

"Last time I went for an allout attack that did not pay off. I watched videos of the bout and this time I could rectify my mistakes," Siwach said as he also got the support of his father and uncle who had come all the way from Haryana to support him.

He will next face Solanki, who had it easy against Louis Fleurot of Mauritius to seal a 5-0 win.

"We never faced in a competition. But I've been his sparring partner in the camp. We all know each others strengths and weaknesses. I'm 100 per cent confident of an easy win," Siwach said.



India bow out of Sudirman Cup

PTI ■ NANNING

India crashed out of the Sudirman Cup mixed team badminton championships after losing 0-5 to 10-time champions China in the second and final group match, here on Wednesday.

After going down 2-3 to Malaysia in their opening Group 1D match, India needed an extraordinary effort to get across the mighty Chinese but the shuttlers yet again produced a below-par performance to go down in a lopsided contest.



The gap between India's mixed doubles pair of Pranaav Jerry Chopra and N Sikki Reddy and Chinese combination of Wang Yilyu and Huang Dongping was evident once again as they went down 5-21, 11-21 against the world No 2 pair to trail 0-1.

Sameer Verma, whose straight-game loss to Lee Zii Jia proved to be vital against Malaysia on Tuesday, once again took the court after Kidambi Srikanth suffered an injury during practice sessions here.

"Won't be playing today due to an injury caused during practice. Will be backing the team for today's all-important match," Srikanth had tweeted ahead of the clash.

In Srikanth's absence, Sameer fought for an hour and 11 minutes in the men's singles tie before losing 17-21, 20-22 against Olympic champion Chen Long as India slumped to 0-2 deficit.

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, who recently made a comeback after recovering from a shoulder injury, and Chirag Shetty were then given the task of taming the world No 7 pair of Han Chengkai and Zhou Haodong but the Indian men's doubles pair lost

Schoolgirl stuns Tai

AFF ■ NANNING

Seventeen-year-old South Korean schoolgirl An Se-Young stunned Taiwan's world number one Tai Tzu-yung to burnish her fast-growing reputation.

Rising star An, who is ranked 50th in the world, roared back to defeat Tai 14-21, 21-18, 21-16 in 66 thrilling minutes.

Taiwan and title-holders South Korea were already into the quarter-finals of the mixed-team world championships, but this was further evidence of An's precious talent.

The teenager An, who also won the New Zealand Open said: "My strategy was to defend in the beginning of each rally and then to take my opportunity."

"My coach advised me to pay attention to the front and keep the rally going. I'm surprised I could beat her."

The 24-year-old Tai said that she had a niggling injury but did not use that as an excuse.

"She's tall, powerful and has very good footwork," the Taiwanese said of her young opponent, who only turned 17 in February.

"She's good in all aspects of the game. She will be an outstanding player in future for sure."

21-18, 15-21, 17-21 to allow China take an unassailable 3-0 lead.

Saina Nehwal then went down 12-21, 17-21 to All England Champion Chen Yufei in a 33-minute women's singles match, while World No 3 women's doubles pair of Chen Qingchen and Jia Yifan beat Ashwini Ponnappa and Sikki 21-12 21-15 as India sunk without a trace.

'Stimac wants India to be one of Asia's best'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian footballers Rahul Bheke and Brandon Fernandes says newly-appointed chief coach Igor Stimac wants the team to be one of Asia's best.

Stimac's appointment has been greeted with much optimism by the players, with as many as nine debutants having got a call-up to the national team camp.

Bheke, who scored the match-winner in the Indian Super League final for his club Bengaluru FC against FC Goa stated that "Stimac wants us to be one of the best teams in Asia".

"We have had a couple of session under him (Igor Stimac), and he is really apprehensive of our abilities as a team. He wants us to target doing well in Asian tournaments, and be one of the best teams in Asia," Bheke said. "I will keep doing what the coach



asks of me and keep trying to work my socks off in his pattern of style of playing football."

FC Goa player Fernandes also highlighted Stimac's desire to be "among the best in Asia".

"He comes with a rich experience. With his experience, I feel it was the right choice to appoint him. He has already shared that he wants us from

us," Brandon said. Stimac has been conducting fitness tests, along with some footballing drills, which the players enjoyed.

The squad will be training in the capital till June 1 and leave for Buriram, Thailand the following day. India have been drawn to play Curacao in their first match of the King's Cup on June 5.

India beat Korea 2-1, clinch series

JINCHEON: The Indian women's hockey team came from a goal down to eke out a close 2-1 win over South Korea in the second game and take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series, here on Wednesday.

The Indians had earlier defeated Korea by identical margin in the opening game of the series.

India will take on Korea in the inconsequential last match of the series on Friday.

On Wednesday, skipper Rani Rampal (37th minute) and Navjot Kaur (50th) scored for India after Lee Seungju gave South Korea the lead in the 19th minute through a field strike.

"Our performance was much better than the first match. Our skill control in today's game was much better and the quality was good and consistent. I believe we could have scored more goals but the intensity and effort was good from the team," India's chief coach



Sjoerd Marijne said after the game.

Marijne said good results here would boost the team's confidence ahead of the important FIH Women's Series Finals in Hiroshima later this year.

"I am happy with the adjustments the team made. It is nice we have won two matches in this three-match series. This will surely boost the team's spirit ahead of the FIH Women's Series Finals Hiroshima 2019," he added. PTI

Kuldeep Yadav is going to be India's trump card: Chawla

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Leg-spinner Piyush Chawla backed Lchinaman bowler Kuldeep Yadav to do well in the ICC World Cup, starting May 30.

Piyush, who was in Lucknow to give some spin lessons to youngsters at Ekana International Stadium, said: "Kuldeep is an aggressive bowler and skipper Virat Kohli liked this quality of him. Though he had a bad IPL, but he got enough time to recover and I am sure he will be India's trump card."

"I think the Indian team is very balanced and with quite a few all-rounders in the squad, team is definitely looking one of the favourites on the dry and facile tracks of England," he added.

Piyush, who was the member of 2011 World Cup winning team, rated Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ekana International Stadium as the one of India's best stadium with best facilities.



Piyush Chawla giving tips to a budding cricketer

Van Persie demands 'fair chance' for Solskjaer

AFF ■ MANCHESTER

Robin van Persie has urged Manchester United to keep faith with Ole Gunnar Solskjaer after the under-fire manager's turbulent end to his first season in charge.

Solskjaer presided over a miserable conclusion to a campaign that saw United fail to qualify for the Champions League after finishing sixth in the Premier League.

However, Van Persie, whose goals helped United win their last Premier League title in 2013, is adamant Solskjaer deserves more time to get the club back on track.

"I think it's the perfect match, it's just they're having a bad spell," Van Persie told BBC Sport on Wednesday.

"Back in the day it was normal for a manager to get time. Nowadays if you lose six games, you're out. Is that the solution?"

"Give someone time, especially if it's a kid from the club."

Former United striker Solskjaer had made a positive impact after replacing the sacked Jose Mourinho as interim boss in December.

Solskjaer oversaw a 15-match unbeaten domestic run and led United to a stunning Champions League last 16, second leg win over Paris Saint-Germain.

But United's form dipped dramatically once Solskjaer was hired on a permanent basis in March and a run of six defeats from their last 10 games shattered their top four hopes.

Solskjaer's problems have mounted amid claims that United midfielder Paul Pogba wants to join Real Madrid, while the boss is reportedly unhappy with the fitness levels and commitment of some of his squad.

Hazard is my Chelsea benchmark: Pulisic

AFF ■ LONDON

Christian Pulisic says he wants to make the same impact that Eden Hazard has had at Chelsea and hopes to play alongside the Belgium superstar at Stamford Bridge.

The US international signed a five-and-a-half year contract with Maurizio Sarri's team in January but was immediately loaned back to Germany to finish the season at Borussia Dortmund.

"It is incredible to see what Eden can do," Pulisic, 20, told the



BBC. "He (Hazard) is a guy to look up to and what I would love to become."

"It is definitely a goal. Any player would be dumb not to want to be in the same team as him."

But the £58 million (\$73 million) signing appears unlikely to get his wish to play alongside Chelsea's star man, with Hazard persistently linked with a move to Real Madrid.

Pulisic, who scored four times in 20 league appearances last season for Dortmund, who finished as runners-up to Bayern

Munich, said he wanted to inspire young American footballers.

"I don't want to be looked at as someone who is the youngest to do this or that," said Pulisic, who is both the youngest player to captain the United States and to score for them in a World Cup qualifier.

"I just want to be an established player and someone people respect, who is successful in this league."

"It is completely new to me and something not a lot of American players have experienced."

Thorgan Hazard joins Dortmund



AFF ■ DORTMUND

Borussia Dortmund confirmed on Wednesday they have signed Thorgan Hazard, the younger brother of Chelsea star Eden, on a five-year deal from Borussia Moenchengladbach.

The 26-year-old winger announced in April that he was joining Dortmund, who finished run-

ners-up in the Bundesliga this season, with only the details of the transfer to sort out.

"I am grateful for five great years at Borussia Moenchengladbach and the wonderful memories," said Hazard in a statement on Dortmund's club website.

"Now was exactly the right point in time to take the next step in my career."

"I am proud to be able to play for Borussia Dortmund — it is a top club with unbelievable fans."

Germany's top-selling daily Bild says the transfer should cost about 25 million euros (\$28m) plus add-ons.

The Belgium international scored 46 goals and provided 44 assists in 182 appearances for Gladbach.

Hazard is the third new signing to join Dortmund for next season.

Germany international Nico Schulz will arrive from Hoffenheim in a deal worth 27 million euros, while teenage defender Mateu Morey, 19, is joining on a free transfer.

Messi, Aguero in Argentina squad

AFF ■ BUENOS AIRES

Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi and the returning Sergio Aguero headed the 23-man Copa America squad announced by Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni.

Paris Saint Germain winger Angel Di Maria was also included but there was no place for striker Gonzalo Higuain, who is on loan at Chelsea from Juventus.

"These are the best players in an important time for the national team," said Scaloni on Tuesday ahead of the tournament hosted by Brazil, which begins on June 14.

Argentina will play in Group B alongside Colombia, Paraguay and guests Qatar, the 2022 World Cup hosts and current Asian champions.

Messi, who only returned to the Argentina squad in March after an eight-month



absence following the World Cup in Russia, will turn 32 during the competition.

Di Maria, like Messi, made his post-World Cup return in March ahead of friendlies against Venezuela and Morocco, but Manchester City's Aguero had not been called up since Argentina's 4-3 last 16 defeat to eventual champions France in Russia.

Another high-profile omission was Inter Milan forward Mauro Icardi, who has been left out of the Italian team's line-up for the last two months over a dispute regarding a contract renewal.

"Keeping everyone happy is difficult," admitted Scaloni, who said he'd had "doubts right until the end" over the final squad make-up.

VIRAT ALONE CAN'T WIN WC: TENDULKAR

Sachin feels Indian teammates need to step up & perform consistently and help captain Kohli during WC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Stacking up staggering numbers with monotonic regularity may have become a day job for Virat Kohli, but he can't win a World Cup without support from his teammates, feels Sachin Tendulkar.

"I think you will always have a couple of individuals stepping up every game but without team support, you can't do much. Just because of one individual, you can't win a tournament. No way. Unless, others chip in at every crucial stage. If that doesn't happen, there will be disappointment," Tendulkar said when asked if Kohli will carry the same burden like he did, specifically during the 1996, 1999 and 2003 editions.

Tendulkar is hardly worried that India doesn't have a settled No 4, saying the slot can be kept flexible as per requirement and match situation.

"I think we have batsmen, who can do the job. Number four is just a number and it can be adjusted. I particularly don't see No 4 as a problem. Our boys have played enough cricket to know their roles whether it is No 4, 6 or 8. Situational awareness is the key," the world's highest run-getter in Tests and ODIs said.

However, Tendulkar is not entirely happy with how the balance of ODIs is skewed towards batsmen, taking bowlers out of equation in white ball cricket with every passing day.

"It's become one sided with



"I THINK YOU WILL ALWAYS HAVE A COUPLE OF INDIVIDUALS STEPPING UP EVERY GAME BUT WITHOUT TEAM SUPPORT, YOU CAN'T DO MUCH. JUST BECAUSE OF ONE INDIVIDUAL, YOU CAN'T WIN A TOURNAMENT"

introduction of two new balls and flat pitches have made lives of bowlers much more difficult. One team is scoring 350 and the other is chasing down inside 45 overs," Tendulkar said in reference to the recent England versus Pakistan series where bowlers had a nightmarish time.

What Tendulkar finds even more disappointing is that reverse swing had been taken out of equation with two new balls.

"The ball is staying hard. I mean when was the last time you saw reverse swing in ODIs?" questioned the iconic batsman.

"When we played and there was one new ball, it would start reversing from 28th or 30th over. Some teams could get it to reverse even earlier. At the death, the ball would go soft, even get discoloured. These were chal-

lenges that batsmen faced. But now the ball remains hard and the bats are getting better," lamented Tendulkar, who played six World Cups.

According to him, wrist spinners are the one breed of bowlers who will do well, and India have two in Kuldeep and Chahal.

The Australians read the duo quite well during the home series in India but the maestro said that it won't matter much in England.

"Let's understand this. There are a number of bowlers who have been read well by batters but yet they end up getting a lot of wickets. So Kuldeep and Chahal shouldn't be too worried about Australia series," he said, adding both will play a massive role during the middle overs.

"Agreed the Aussies read them well but does that mean they wouldn't be committing mistakes or can't be forced to commit mistakes."

What Tendulkar liked about the composition of the World Cup-bound India team is the blend of youth and experience.

"There is a good balance in the side. We have a number of guys with 8-10 years of experience and at the same time we have talented youngsters like Kuldeep, Rahul, Chahal, Hardik (Pandya) and Jasprit (Bumrah) with a couple of years of international cricket.

"So it's a perfect blend with all the makings of a wonderful team. I rate our chances very high," concluded Tendulkar.



Host of match-winners, Dhoni's expertise make India favourites: Mithali

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A slew of match-winners coupled with Mahendra Singh Dhoni's expertise make India favourites to lift the upcoming ICC Men's Cricket World Cup, believes Mithali Raj, captain of national women's ODI team.

"The Indian team has a lot of match-winners now," Mithali said in a video posted on Twitter.

"Of course, the captain (Virat Kohli) leads from the front with the openers Rohit Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan, but we also have fast bowlers like Jasprit Bumrah and the spinners," she said.

"But overall I think, the team which posts a big total and the bowlers who are able to do the job to contain those runs, is the team which is going to win. But then we do have a lot of depth. We have the expertise of Dhoni in the side. So, I can't pick one player, but India definitely has a lot of match-winners."

Asked which team has a better chance to lift the trophy, Mithali said, "India is absolutely going in as favourites because they have been doing very well in the one-dayers and in other formats in the recent past."

Mithali, however, also picked hosts England as another team who can go on to clinch their maiden 50-over World Cup title.

"But I cannot rule out the home team (England). Even they have done very well. They had some 10 to 15 victory streaks in the one-dayers. They will also play on home conditions. Having said that, I think as an Indian I will root for India," she said.

Buttler is England's dangerman: Ponting

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

England boasts of a number of match-winners in their 15-man World Cup squad, but former Australia captain Ricky Ponting has handpicked Jos Buttler as the dangerman for the hosts in the showpiece.

"The dangerman for England is gonna be Jos Buttler. I just watched him develop over the last 2 or 3 years. I had a chance to coach him at Mumbai Indians 3 or 4 seasons ago when he was really sort of starting to make his mark in international cricket," Ponting was quoted as saying in a video posted at Cricket Australia website.

"What he has done in the last 12 to 18 months whether in a T20, One-Day game or a Test match for England, it's really outstanding. So, Jos Buttler is England's dangerman for me."

"He (Buttler) might not take the gloves but his middle-order batting is out of this world. He scores 360 degrees around the ground, hits the ball incredibly hard, hits the ball a long way as well," he added.

Besides Buttler, England's team comprises of match-winners like



skipper Eoin Morgan, Jonny Bairstow, Joe Root, Ben Stokes and Jofra Archer to name a few.

The two-time World Cup winning skipper said England's depth in the batting department makes the hosts a force to reckon with in the upcoming World Cup.

"I think England's great strength right now in their One-Day team is how deep they bat. That allows all

their top-order to play probably with more freedom than most other teams," Ponting said.

"Someone like a Buttler or (Ben) Stokes or Moeen Ali coming in at 7, 8, 9, allows their top-order to go hard. They are a really confident outfit. They have got great depth in their squad and obviously would be playing in conditions they are very much used to."

This Eng squad is the best I've seen: Vaughan

PTI ■ LONDON

In-form England have the "best opportunity" to break their title jinx in the ODI World Cup and they will be at the heart of what promises to be a "special" showpiece event, said former captain Michael Vaughan.

"It's the best opportunity in my time for England — I remember 1992 as a youngster, watching that final at college," Vaughan said.

"They got to the semi-finals of the Champions Trophy two years ago but didn't get over the line on that occasion. They've got to see that as a real positive experience and if they get into the semis again, play smart cricket."

Vaughan also termed England's 15-man World Cup squad as the best he has ever seen.

"This England squad is the best I've seen. They have earned the right to be favourites," Vaughan was quoted as saying by BBC Sport after England named their 15-man squad for the tournament.

"I think we're in for a special World Cup — world-class players, world-class teams — and I think England will be right at the



heart of it," he said.

England included pace sensation Jofra Archer in the squad besides all-rounder Tom Curran and Hampshire off-spinner Liam Dawson in place of David Willey and Joe Denly, who were named in England's provisional squad.

"I feel for Willey, he hasn't really let England down, but it's the nature of international sport that you have to be ruthless," Vaughan said.

"You have to pick who you feel is the right 15 and I feel they've got it right."

Bowlers are scared of me but won't admit: Gayle

PTI ■ LONDON

Self-proclaimed 'Universe Boss' Chris Gayle on Wednesday boasted that bowlers across the world are "scared" of him but would not admit it on camera.

Gayle said off camera though, the same bowlers would say, "he is the man, he is the man".

Gayle, who amassed 424 runs at an average of 106 in four matches against tournament favourites England earlier this year, has arrived in the United Kingdom for his fifth and final World Cup.

"Youngsters coming at my head — it's not as easy as it was like one time before. I was quicker then. But they'll be weary. They know what the Universe Boss is capable of. I'm sure they will have it in the back of their mind, 'Hey, this is the most dangerous batsman they've ever seen in cricket,'" Gayle told *cricket.Com.Au*.

Asked if his opponents are still scared of him, Gayle said: "Can't you tell? You go ask them. Go ask them on camera. They're going to say, no, they're not scared. But you ask them off the camera, they're going to say, 'Yeah, he's the man. He's the man.' They're going to say, 'he's the man.'"

"But they won't say it (on camera), they won't be frank and upfront and say, 'Listen to me straight up, Chris Gayle is the man.'"

"But I'm enjoying it. I'm always enjoying the battle against fast bowlers, it's good. Sometimes those things actually give you extra drive as a batter. When you have a battle, I like those challenges."

Maxwell keen to play a part with the ball

PTI ■ SOUTHAMPTON

Better known for his hard-hitting abilities, Glenn Maxwell has set his sights on becoming an asset for Australia with his part-time off-spin in the upcoming ICC World Cup.

Maxwell has averaged five overs per match since Aaron Finch took over as skipper, compared to just 2.4 overs under Steve Smith's captaincy.

He also completed his full quota of 10 overs three times in the recent tours of India and the UAE.

"That's probably the clarity I have with my role," the Victorian told reporters when asked about his role as a bowler.

"It's something I did a little in Dubai and India, I started to get a few more overs and get that consistency. To have that continue into my time at Lancashire where I got plenty of time at the bowling crease, you get that rhythm and feel of the ball



coming out consistently.

"You need that as a part-time bowler to have that consistency and time at the crease. Just get the cobwebs out a bit," Maxwell added.

Maxwell's effectiveness with his part-time spin can be assessed from the fact that he finished as Australia's third-most economical bowler in the 10 games against India and Pakistan on the sub-continent. "A lot of the time I

bow I just try and limit boundary balls. If they (batsmen) hit good shots off my bowling then I'm not too fazed. But if I'm limiting boundary balls and giving myself the best chance to squeeze a few dot balls and some tight over it might create some pressure at the other end," he said, emphasising his role as a bowler.

"I think it's important for me to bowl in a partnership with someone."

Mortaza urges caution on World Cup hopes

AFP ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Mortaza has poured cold water on fan hopes for this month's World Cup, warning that the seventh-ranked team was facing an uphill battle in the group stage.

Supporters were jubilant after a tri-nation series win against Ireland and West Indies on the weekend handed Bangladesh its first ever multi-team tournament trophy.

But Mashrafe's side start the Cup race with a bracing fixture against South Africa, New Zealand and top-ranked hosts England in their first three matches.

"It will be difficult for us because our opponents in the opening three games are extremely strong," Mashrafe told reporters late on Tuesday before heading to England.

"To get a positive result against them won't be easy."

Mashrafe said the win had heightened expectations of Bangladesh fans, along with other recent triumphs including the side's semi-finals appearance at the 2017 Champions Trophy.

"In the last five to seven years, people have started to come to watch us with expectations that we will win," he said.

"All I can say is that the World Cup will be a different ball game. If you follow cricket in England, you will see that



a lot of runs are scored. It will need a different approach." Bangladesh hope to at least match their previous best performance in a World Cup, reaching the quarter-finals in 2015.

Rahane scores hundred on County debut

PTI ■ NEWPORT

India's Test vice-captain IJinkya Rahane had a memorable English County debut, scoring a hundred for Hampshire against Nottinghamshire in a Division One game here on Wednesday.

Rahane thus became the third Indian to score a hundred on county debut after Piyush Chawla, for Sussex against Worcestershire and Murali Vijay for Essex against Nottinghamshire.

Rahane, who had scored just 10 in the first innings, struck a patient 119 off 260 balls, hit 14 boundaries and shared a 257-run stand for the third wicket with Sam Northeast, who was unbeaten on 131 at tea on the third day.

Rahane came in at No 3 in the fifth over of the innings and was dismissed by off-spinner Matthew Carter at the stroke of tea in the 70th over.

Rahane reached his hundred with a cover drive off Carter that fetched him two runs. The celebration was muted. This was his 30th first-class hundred.